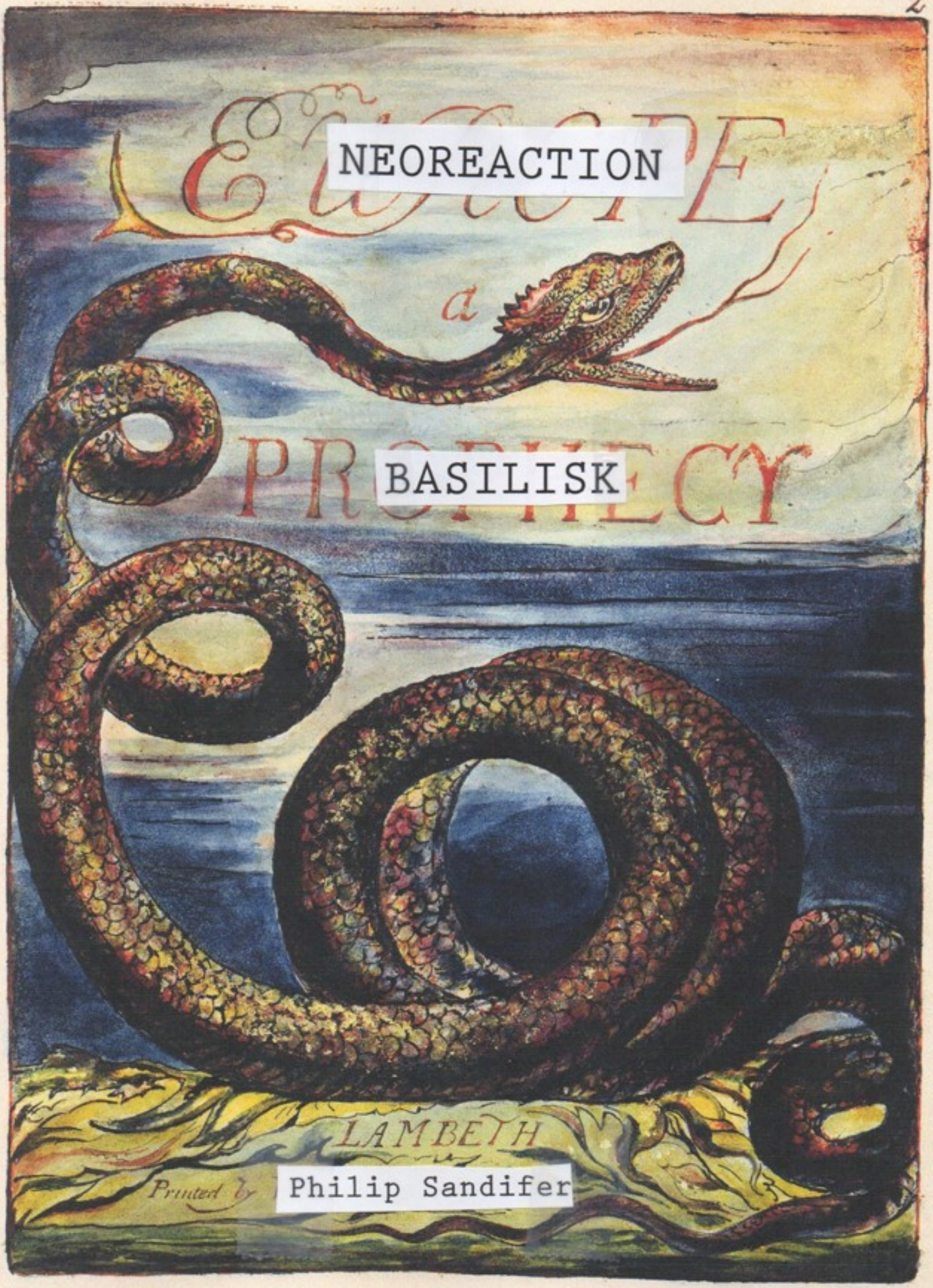
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I.

"Do you know that every time you turn another page, you not only get us closer to the monster at the end of this book, but you make a terrible mess?" - Grover, *The Monster at the End of This Book*

Let us assume that we are fucked. The particular nature of our doom is up for any amount of debate, but the basic fact of it seems largely inevitable. My personal guess is that millennials will probably live long enough to see the second Great Depression, which will blur inexorably with the full brunt of climate change to lead to a massive human dieback, if not quite an outright extinction. But maybe it'll just be a rogue AI and a grey goo scenario. You never know.

There are several reactions we might have to this realization, and many of us have more than one. The largest class of these reactions are, if not uninteresting, at least relatively simple, falling under some category of self-delusion or cognitive dissonance. From the perspective of 2016 the eschaton appears to be in exactly the wrong place, such that we're either going to just miss it or only see the early "shitloads of people dying" bits. And even if it is imminent, there is no reason to expect most of us to engage with it differently than any other terminal diagnosis, which is to say, to minimize the amount of time we spend consciously dying. Indeed, my polite authorial recommendation would be to do exactly that if you are capable, probably starting by simply not reading this.

Hm. Well, no one to blame but yourself, I suppose. A second category, marginally more interesting, is what we might call decelerationist approaches. (The name is a back formation from the accelerationists, more about whom later.) These amount to attempts to stave off the inevitable as best as possible; perhaps by attempting to reduce carbon emissions and engage in conservation efforts to minimize the impact of the anthropocene extinction or by writing fanfic to conjure the AI Singularity or something. These efforts are often compatible with active self-delusion, and in most regards the current political system is a broad-based coalition of these two approaches. But the decelerationist is at least engaged in a basic project of good. I tend to think the project is doomed (although being wrong about that would be lovely), however, and this work is on the whole aimed at those who similarly feel somewhat unsatisfied with decelerationism.

From this point the numbering of categories becomes increasingly untenable as we enter the constellation of approaches to which this book is

broadly directed; those whose reaction towards the eschaton is not simply or primarily an effort to evade it. This includes the outright accelerationists, whose attitude is that the eschaton should be brought about ASAP, but also those for whom the eschaton is an object of fantasy and dread - those who imagine it but do not necessarily wish to bring it about, and those who attempt to predict and plan for it, for whom the future, by definition almost but not quite present, hangs like looming weather, lurking like a memory.

It is born out of a frustration with the genre of sprawlingly mad manifesto-like magnum opuses in this area, a genre that at times seems dominated, at least in terms of practical influence, by an AI crank, a racist technolibertarian, and a literal madman philosopher. I do not mean to suggest that these constitute the entirety of significant eschatological thought, and certainly not the best of it. Indeed, I find all them at best unsatisfying and at worst loathsome for a variety of reasons, generally ones born of political leftism. Nor is it to suggest that there is some sort of coherent position these three thinkers map out; their influences on each other are substantial, and there's an entire school of thought, generally known as neoreaction, that's heavily influenced by all three, but they are three distinct thinkers who have different and ultimately irreconcilable goals. They simply collectively form an object of definable scope, the exploration of which seems likely to yield some useful perspective on the end of all things. To start, then, let us look at the big three manifesto-writing visionaries alluded to above, namely Eliezer Yudkowsky, Curtis (aka Mencius Moldbug), and Nick Land.

We'll start with Eliezer Yudkowsky, who is the one of the three to emphatically not be a neoreactionist, and indeed prone to getting quite cross at the suggestion that he has anything to do with them. The official description of Eliezer Yudkowsky, and by this I of course mean the first sentence of his Wikipedia article, is that he "is an American artificial intelligence researcher known for popularizing the idea of friendly artificial intelligence." Being Wikipedia, most of this is almost right. The material bulk of Yudkowsky's output would make him best described as a science blogger, although "AI researcher" and "novelist" are both factually accurate, as, for that matter, is "American." And while friendly artificial intelligence is certainly an idea he's discussed, it's a little hyper-specific to describe someone who's more broadly a popularizer of the AI Singularity; a sort of Ray Kurzweil for the millennialist set. His own website, meanwhile, begins with the description that he's "a man who wears more than one hat." If one wanted to be snarkily uncharitable - and if it's not clear, this is very much the sort of book that does - one could

say that this is true, but that all of his hats are the same color and don't quite flatter.

But none of this quite captures the uncanny strangeness that makes Yudkowsky so compelling, both as a writer to take seriously and as a bizarre symptom to obsessively pick at in pursuit of obscure and likely disreputable goals. And however easy he is to mock (and any writer worth their salt is easy to mock), he is indeed both of these things. This strangeness comes from the sort of outsized ambition of his work. The largest single piece, a series of blog posts now collected as a six-volume book entitled *Rationality: From AI to Zombies*, but more typically known as the Sequences. Its title belies its scope slightly, in that it picks two disparate but fanciful things to form its range; it is of the largely abandoned genre of from-first-principles systemic philosophical worldviews, of a genuine intellectual heft comparable to Kant's Critiques, assuming you don't much care for Kant's critiques.

Its best analogue, however, would be Baruch Spinoza's *Ethics*, a 17th century epic that attempted to derive the entirety of metaphysics and ethics via Euclid's method of geometric proofs, starting with rigorously expressed axioms and definitions and moving onwards to a coherent moral philosophy about the existence of God in all things. Yudkowsky, on the other hand, begins with a statistical notion called Bayes' theorem and ends with a futuristic godlike artificial intelligence that reincarnates a perfect simulation of you to live forever. (He's firmly in favor of this as a practical agenda, and thus best classified as a decelerationist according to our rough schema.)

Bayes' theorem - no, don't worry, this isn't going to be a high-math book, I'm an English major - is a way of assessing the probability of something based on the probability of a related event. There's a lot of standard examples and explanations, but Yudkowsky's is actually really good - he uses an example about breast cancer rates, saying that 1% of women aged forty have breast cancer, 80% of those will get positive results on mammograms, and that 9.6% of healthy women will also get positives, then asks what the likelihood is that a woman who just got a positive mammogram actually has breast cancer. And he does the whole thing about how only about 15% of doctors actually get this problem right, and helpfully includes a JavaScript calculator widget at every step of the argument so that readers can play with the numbers as he's explaining them. It's properly great science writing, accessibly explaining a cool and significant bit of statistics, at least to the sorts of people inclined to fiddle around with a Javascript calculator whose instructions amount to "when in doubt, use parentheses." (It turns out that the odds are way lower than most

people expect - only 7.8% of forty-year-old women with positive mammograms would have breast cancer with those numbers.)

But there's something odd about how Yudkowsky sets this explanation up. He hypes it incredibly, as the hottest basic concept going in mathematics right now. "What is the so-called Bayesian Revolution now sweeping through the sciences, which claims to subsume even the experimental method itself as a special case? What is the secret that the adherents of Bayes know? What is the light that they have seen? Soon you will know. Soon you will be one of us." The strange, cult-induction tone of this finish is rhetorical irony, to be sure, but it's also deliberate. Yudkowsky really does believe this one weird trick about figuring out the relationships among probabilities constitutes the key to a fundamental realignment of human thought.

The way he gets from calculator widgets to an attempt to demonstrate this claim illustrates both the appeal and fundamental limitations of Yudkowsky's style. He frames the problem repeatedly, discussing how different phrasings of the same basic facts make people more or less likely to intuit how worrisome a positive mammogram actually is, providing the calculator again and again so that readers can fiddle the numbers until they understand the underlying principles of how you get 7.8%. And this is really his focus - how Bayes' theorem works, math-wise, is just a point established along the way to trying to establish the ways in which language most effectively leads to Bayesian inference being intuitive.

The thing is, there's actually some pretty good cognitive science behind the idea that human brains instinctively work along Bayesian lines, and Yudkowsky is capable of effectively depicting that process. For instance, at one point in the Sequences he describes a hypothetical pundit preparing in advance for a TV show responding to an interest rate adjustment from the Federal Reserve. The pundit has a certain amount of time to prepare, and knows the possible reports he'd give based on the things the Fed might do, but has to figure out how much time to allot to preparing for each outcome. Yudkowsky describes the thought process thusly:

"And yet... even in your uncertain state of mind, it seems that you anticipate the three events differently; that you expect to need some excuses more than others. And—this is the fascinating part—when you think of something that makes it seem more likely that bond prices will go up, then you feel less likely to need an excuse for bond prices going down or remaining the same. It even seems like there's a relation between how much you anticipate each of the three outcomes, and how much time you want to spend preparing each excuse."

It's a good account of the way a person intuitively budgets time, and sure enough can be related to Bayes' theorem. And Yudkowsky really is good at this sort of stuff. His other magnum opus is an epic Harry Potter fanfiction entitled *Harry Potter and the Methods of Rationality* that, while obviously sounding completely ridiculous, can't really be condemned in stronger terms than "it's not much worse than *Atlas Shrugged*." In this he applies his literary Bayesianism to a variety of children's fantasy plot logics in ways that are in turns amusing and, especially when the line between Yudkowsky and his reimagining of Harry Potter as rationalist child prodigy is at its thinnest, genuinely affecting.

But there's also a distinct problem when applied to the scale of the task Yudkowsky actually sets out on, which is a comprehensive account of why the most important problem currently facing mankind is figuring out how to teach an artificial intelligence to be friendly before we accidentally invent a super-AI that takes over the world and kills us all because, as he puts it in one of his most evocative sentences, "the AI does not hate you, nor does it love you, but you are made out of atoms which it can use for something else." The appeal of Bayes' theorem is rooted in the existence of actual numbers under the hood. It's first and foremost an equation. But sci-fi scenarios like super-AIs don't actually have easily discernible probabilities attached to them, and no amount of wording your claims in ways that facilitate intuitive Bayesian inferences is going to magically introduce mathematical precision into a discussion of them.

That's not to say that Yudkowsky's literary Bayesianism isn't compelling; he uses it to effectively illustrate a number of common cognitive errors such as optimism bias. Indeed, this is where he largely made his name, on a pair of blogs called *Overcoming Bias* and *LessWrong* in which he originally serialized the Sequences. But it's still essentially a declaration that as long as you frame your sentences in a particular way you can successfully figure out anything, which is the same error that infects every from-first-premises work of philosophy ever.

In practice, what happens is that words are not mathematics, and so any such extended effort slowly accrues a myriad of poor phrasings. Most are small, niggling things; a quibble over a precise definition or a minor clarification to a summary. Others are more substantive, but still the sorts of things that could probably be hashed out in a three-or-four e-mail exchange. (Indeed, the comments on the original blog posts often consist of these quibbles, though Yudkowsky tended not to be interested in being corrected.) But they add up, especially over the course of a lengthy work. This doesn't make the work less compelling; indeed, it is generally the strange implications generated by this process that makes philosophy an interesting literary genre.

But it does mean that the meticulous precision their structure always starts by promising always lies in tatters by the end, their work inevitably more valuable for its evocative properties than its rational ones.

And sure enough, from these helpful tips for avoiding cognitive bias Yudkowsky inexorably slides towards something much weirder, such that by the end it's making claims about quantum mechanics and concluding that it's vitally important we try to build a friendly superintelligent computer that will preserve our souls for all eternity. To an outside observer, there's a certain absurdist demonstration to it. Yudkowsky starts from the premise that we are badly crippled by cognitive biases and then steadily lets his cognitive biases lead him to a ridiculous conclusion. To an inside observer, and Yudkowsky has attracted quite the following, well, once you have a litany of logical fallacies and cognitive biases that long it's easy to find a reason to dismiss just about any objection you want to. Indeed, Yudkowsky builds out an extensive theory of "inferential distances" that explains how you just can't meaningfully communicate with poor deluded fools who are several steps of the argument behind you, such that the opinions of people who have not completely understood all of the hundreds of pages of material leading up to a given conclusion (where understanding is demonstrated, of course, by agreeing with the conclusion) don't really matter in the first place, and can simply be told "you really should read the sequences" and ignored until they stop disagreeing with you.

But there's a larger issue here: the literary from-first-premises structure isn't just always going to fall short of the immaculate precision of mathematics, it's also only ever been a literary genre, not a way people actually think. Eliezer Yudkowsky did not, in reality, sit down with Bayes' theorem one day and linearly work his way to the AI Singularity. He wanted to live forever in a computer, and set about designing a worldview that supported this goal. This is in no way a flaw in his worldview, but any understanding of his worldview that doesn't recognize "I want to live forever in a computer" as its most important premise is lacking.

Still, Yudkowskian thought has its appeal, and indeed a significant community formed around his writing. Indeed, this is true in two very different regards. First, it's important to understand that Yudkowsky really does believe that this friendly AI problem is the most important issue facing humanity, and so created a nonprofit, originally called the Singularity Institute for Artificial Intelligence, but these days called the Machine Intelligence Research Institute (MIRI - the acronym I'll use throughout) to research it - a nonprofit that attracted some significant funding. Second, Yudkowsky's

thought and style influenced a lot of people, and a sizeable community formed around his two sites, and especially *LessWrong*. And it is this latter community from which the most spectacularly strange element of Yudkowsky's thought emerged.

Neil Gaiman postulates in *The Sandman* the existence of an ancient cult dedicated to Despair (the literal embodiment), the only one of its kind in history, which perished within two years as its tenets drove all of its members to suicide. This isn't quite what happened to *LessWrong*, but it's amusingly close. Or, if you prefer a more thematically on point analogy, think of the scene in that sci-fi movie where they blow up the computer with a logical paradox. The lethal meme, known as Roko's Basilisk, used the peculiarities of Yudkowskian thought to posit a future AI that would effectively torture everyone from the present who had ever imagined it for all eternity if they subsequently failed in any way to do whatever they could to bring about its existence.

Theology buffs will recognize this as a variation of Pascal's Wager, which it was, but carefully tailored to work within a particular system, and deliberately framed in terms of the popular Internet meme of "the Game," where the only rules are that you lose any time you think about the Game, and that you must then announce having done so. But for all that its basic contours are familiar, it's crucial to realize that Roko arrived at his monster honestly and sincerely, assembling premises widely accepted by the *LessWrong* community until he found himself unexpectedly transfixed by the Basilisk's gaze. The result was a frankly hilarious community meltdown in which people lost their shit as ideas they'd studiously internalized threatened to torture them for all eternity if they didn't hand all of their money over to MIRI, culminating in Yudkowsky himself stepping in to ban all further discussion of the dread beast. This went more or less exactly how anyone who has ever used the Internet would guess. Those interested in the details can readily look them up, but suffice to say it was not the sort of incident from which one's school of thought recovers its intellectual respectability.

But it's not as though the other strand of Yudkowsky's influence, MIRI, does much better for itself. While the institute has put out a couple of minor papers, there's a conspicuous lack of research on machine intelligence emerging from it. Aside from the problem that Yudkowsky is not actually a brilliant programmer capable of making headway on the persistently difficult problems that have been facing artificial intelligence for decades, this is largely because the problem he identifies - how to make an AI friendlier - is simply not one that artificial intelligence research is in a position to grapple with yet.

Not, as one would quickly surmise from even the most cursory look at science fiction about robots, because nobody has thought of this problem, but simply because real-world AI design sucks too much to even deal with it in a meaningful way.

But while MIRI has largely become a punchline since they recruited GiveWell, a major charity watchdog, to write a report on their effectiveness that ended up concluding they were actively hindering their ostensible cause, that doesn't mean that it's disappeared, or even that it's not well-funded. Indeed, for all his obvious deficiencies, Yudkowsky has remained pretty popular among the San Francisco tech-bro culture he emerged out of. But for our purposes the most interesting detail about MIRI's support is that its funders include Peter Thiel. Thiel is the second best known of the so-called PayPal Mafia, the initial founders of the now-ubiquitous online payment system who have subsequently become billionaire investors. The best known - Elon Musk - is everybody's favorite cuddly tech billionaire, splashing money on electric cars and human space flight and all that good stuff. Peter Thiel, on the other hand, is a markedly less cuddly one, splashing money in equal parts on tech causes like MIRI and right-wing politics. And his politics are solidly right-wing - libertarian trending into strange terrain like his oft-quoted declaration that "I no longer believe freedom and democracy are compatible."

But in unpacking the implications of that declaration it's less helpful to look at Thiel, who's ultimately more inclined to throw a couple million dollars at a problem and see what happens than to engage in lengthy philosophical diatribes, than it is to look at another person whose work he's funding, Curtis Yarvin. These days Yarvin is best known as the founder of Urbit, a startup tech company providing, in its own words, "a decentralized computing platform built on a clean-slate OS." Or, perhaps more accurately, he's best known for the astonishing levels of protest that take place whenever a tech conference invites him to speak, generally based on the accusation that he believes in reinstituting slavery and thinks that black people make especially good slaves. The reason for this is relatively simple: he believes in reinstituting slavery and thinks that black people make especially good slaves.

This remarkable claim, along with many others, came during his several year tenure blogging under the name Mencius Moldbug on his website *Unqualified Reservations*, although it's worth noting that one of the sites he got his start as a commenter on was *Overcoming Bias*, i.e. where Yudkowsky was writing before *LessWrong*. Moldbug is a long-winded blogger - even his stand-alone posts are quite long, and his major works constitute multiple posts, most notably the fourteen-part *An Open Letter to Open-Minded Progressives*, which we'll

get to in a moment. But if one wants to see the basic appeal of Moldbug, one must turn to his considerably shorter *A Gentle Introduction To Unqualified Reservations*, a mere nine-parter (although the ninth part is in three sub-parts, with a fourth having inflated to a book and then seemingly defeated its writer, never to be published).

"New UR readers," he proclaims at the start, "unfortunately, I'm lying. There is no such thing as a gentle introduction to UR. It's like talking about a 'mild DMT trip.' If it was mild, it wasn't DMT." The appeal is obvious: Moldbug is out of his fucking skull. Listen to this shit, after he proclaims that he's going to give readers a *Matrix*-like red pill (not quite the one offered by MRAs, but Moldbug's where they got the term from): "Our genuine red pill is not ready for the mass market. It is the size of a golfball, though nowhere near so smooth, and halfway down it splits in half and exposes a sodium-metal core, which will sear your throat like a live coal. There will be scarring."

I want to be clear, with all possible sincerity, that I like this. I like the braggadocio. I want what he is selling. Yes, Mencius, savagely tear away the veil of lies with which I cope with the abject horror that is reality and reveal to me the awful, agonizing truth of being. Give me the red pill. The problem is, once we get our golfball-sized reality distortion pill home, put on some Laibach, and settle in for an epic bout of Thanatosian psychedelia we discover the unfortunate truth: we're actually just huffing paint in an unhygienic gas station bathroom. Jesus, this isn't even bat country.

Actually, Moldbug's impressively discursive style makes it difficult to identify a moment that one could point to and call "the red pill." There's nothing like Yudkowsky's primer on Bayes that one looks at and thinks "OK, that's quite a good explanation," and no iconic argument that serves as a hook. Generally speaking, however, the awful, searing truth with which Moldbug believes we cannot cope is that liberal democracy is pretty shit. Moldbug puts a genuine effort into selling this truth, arguing that there exists a de facto conspiracy of, as he puts it in the *Open Letter*, "mainstream academia, journalism and education" that he calls the Cathedral, as it constitutes a de facto state religion that means that democracy is secretly an Orwellian mind control process. And to be fair, Moldbug really sells it, essentially spinning a vast historical conspiracy theory in which the Roundheads of the English Civil War have secretly controlled the world for centuries via the false rhetoric of classical liberalism and the Enlightenment. But it's hard not to notice that this is basically crap.

By "crap," of course, I do not mean "wrong." Rather, I mean obvious, in the sense of sounding like the guy at the bar watching the news and muttering

about how "they're all a bunch of crooks." Liberal democracy is secretly preserved by a system of continual indoctrination, and is a hopelessly inadequate and doomed system? You don't say. Next you'll be telling me about the way the factory farming system that stands between the world and massive famine is slowly killing itself via global warming.

Though actually, and this is where Moldbug becomes interesting, if not any more right, that's not where he goes with it. Instead he wanders back over the past few centuries of history, endlessly dissecting the turn towards liberal democracy and diagnosing its errors, first in terms of the American revolution versus the British monarchy, then, carefully circling around the problem of the Holocaust, suggesting that the same basic process occurred in World War II, explaining that "the 'international community' is a predator" and "reactionaries are its prey," and that the Nazis lost because fascism was an inept attempt at reactionary philosophy. This also leaves a lot to be desired, of course, but it's at least a more interesting sort of failure than the banality of "democracy's a bit shit, ennit?"

The problem, Moldbug concludes, is one of chaos. Democracy is endlessly compromised by progressivism, which moves it eternally leftwards with its eternal mantra of change. This is chaotic; Moldbug prefers order. Indeed, he values order for its own sake. As he puts it, "the order that the rational reactionary seeks to preserve and/or restore is *arbitrary*. Perhaps it can be justified on some moral basis. But probably not. It is good simply because it is order, and the alternative to order is violence at worst and politics at best."

There are obviously plenty of problems here. Indeed, Moldbug acknowledges them, granting that authoritarian structures are hardly a surefire path to non-violence. But, he promises, he's got a really great idea for how to fix it all. And it's this, really, that defines Moldbug in all his mad, stupid glory. How do you get a non-destructive authoritarian? "The answer: find the world's best CEO, and give him undivided control over budget, policy and personnel." But wait, he's even got a suggestion as to who: "I don't think there is any debate about it. The world's best CEO is Steve Jobs."

This is literally Mencius Moldbug's solution. Hire Steve Jobs to run the world. (Actually just California, but.) Now, it is not as though Moldbug is not aware of the joke here. And yes, more important than the identity of the CEO is the bit about "undivided control." But none of these disclaimers quite erase the striking weirdness of this idea. The problem is, it's not a particularly compelling weirdness. Speaking as someone typing words on a MacBook Air right now in an apartment with eight other Apple devices in it, the idea of a government run by Steve Jobs sounds more or less like the worst thing

imaginable, and not just because he's dead. (He wasn't when Moldbug made the suggestion, to be clear.)

Indeed, it's reasonable to ask why on Earth Moldbug believes Steve Jobs to be a remotely suitable governmental leader. The answer, coming when Moldbug suggests the terms on which Jobs's governorship should be evaluated, is tremendously revealing: "we can define responsibility in *financial* terms. If we think of California as a *profitable* corporation, a capital asset whose purpose is to maximize its production of cash, we have a definition of responsibility which is not only precise and unambiguous, but indeed quantitative."

With this, we have a genuinely tricky moment, simply because the sheer and unbridled number of unexamined assumptions going on here. In many ways they form a knot too thick to unpick - you can't just isolate, for instance, the idea that a precise and unambiguous metric for how well the government is performing is a desirable concept in the first place from the bizarre and unspoken sociopathy of a view of government utterly unconnected to any motive based on the wellbeing of its population. But to my mind the most compellingly fucked up thing here is the basic idea that turning a profit is an inherently desirable act.

Actually, this underlies a lot of what's wrong with Moldbug. It's not that I doubt that he has answers to the obvious question of why turning a profit is a good thing; I'm sure he does. Rather, it is that he does not consider this question obvious enough to bring up and answer alongside his assertion. And this really is stunningly weird in the context of all his red pill rhetoric about the corrupt horrors of liberal democracy. Because while there are a great many obvious critiques of liberal democracy, "there's just not enough respect for profit" really doesn't feel like one of them.

This fact exposes a much larger hole within Moldbug's thought. A key tenet of his argument is that the Cathedral is responsible for a steady and eternal leftward drift in post-Enlightenment culture, as evidenced by progress in things like civil rights and feminism. Indeed, it's one of the most-quoted passages of Moldbug, a genuinely well-paced segment of the first part of the *Open Letter* in which he imagines the arc of history - the grand design of Kleio herself - as an aquatic terror worshipped and sustained by the Cathedral, lurking beneath the deep, and suggests analyzing its movements, watching its progress. "Cthulhu may swim slowly," he finally proclaims, "but he only swims left."

Two things are striking here. The first is that Moldbug just rewrote Martin Luther King's "the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards

justice" as Lovecraft fanfic. This is without question one of the most brazenly funny moves in the entire history of Western philosophy. The second is that Moldbug does not actually seem to realize that he's done this. Think about it. The Cathedral is a vast and interconnected system of media and academia designed to feed the population a steady diet of blue pills to keep them from figuring out that the world is a lie. And the idea that there has been a steady cultural progress on issues like race and gender over the course of, say, American history is one of the most basic narratives put out by the Cathedral. Why, then, does Moldbug uncritically accept it? After all, it's not as though that narrative isn't riddled with holes and based on the systematic erasure of numerous ways in which various historical periods have actually been more egalitarian than contemporary America. That's not to reject the idea that Kleio's a classical liberal and that there are important ways in which the present is more egalitarian than many previous eras, nor to suggest that the many historical periods that, in point of fact, were significantly more progressive than the present day are in some objective sense "better" because of it. It's just that the idea of American history as a narrative of ongoing progressive victory should be considered at least as dodgy as any other part of the Cathedral's propaganda, and yet Moldbug buys it hook, line, and sinker without even realizing that he's parroting a black man.

But what's really striking is that Moldbug does not even stop to consider why the Cathedral might benefit from this narrative of continual progress. The obvious reason to constantly and unceasingly trumpet your progress in one area, after all, is to distract from your lack of progress in another. And for all the structural inequality that's been removed from American society in terms of race and gender, there's one structural inequality that's never come close to being challenged, namely the divide between the rich and powerful and everybody else. Of course, this isn't a divide that Moldbug (who is after all not uncomfortable with the basic morality of slavery) is terribly concerned with in the first place, or else he wouldn't be trumpeting profit as the purpose of government. But it's nevertheless a big one.

Indeed, it's one which reveals the entire dualism between the monarchic pre-Enlightenment and the democratic post-Enlightenment that Moldbug's historical narrative rests upon to be fundamentally inadequate. Moldbug trumpets the observation that the American Revolution was not based on serious-minded ideological grievances and grotesque abuses of imperial power as though it's a profound novelty, but the fact that the American Revolution was not really a cool rap musical by Lin-Manuel Miranda but rather a bunch of rich guys consolidating their power has actually been well remarked upon.

Usually by leftist academics. Indeed, there's actually a significant leftist intellectual tradition that can fairly legitimately claim to be completely suppressed within American culture (particularly American political culture), and that's well-known for observing that revolutions and transitions between ideologies generally come down to people with material power protecting that power.

This is, perhaps, unsurprising. Moldbug is consistently weirdly anti-materialist, and indeed is ideologically opposed to historical materialism, largely (though not entirely) allying with the economic theory of the Austrian School, which famously rejects empiricism in favor of a from-first-principles approach based on the idea that humans have free will. His anti-materialism is so complete that at one point he interrogates at length why it might be that the Allied Powers opposed Nazi Germany without once considering "because they looked at a map of Europe and worked out where Hitler was going to go after Czechoslovakia" as an answer, and concludes that therefore World War II must have been about how reactionary movements are prey to predatory progressive movements. But all the same, if you're going to talk about suppressed ideologies that oppose the interests of entrenched power, you've really got to talk about the original red pill: Marxism.

After all, Marxism, especially in its good old-fashioned "a spectre is haunting Europe" revolutionary sense (which is a much larger body of work than Soviet Communism, and indeed one that contains countless scathing critiques of Leninism and Stanlinism) is absolutely one of the positions most completely excluded from the Cathedral, its use in Anglophone politics restricted to a derisive term slung about in the way that "fascist" is applied to Donald Trump, only with less accuracy. Even Bernie Sanders, who aggressively positioned himself for most of his career as a splinter movement to the left of the Democratic party, only ever went so far as to use the term "socialist," a political allegiance that remains in widespread political use in western Europe. When a politician like Jeremy Corbyn, who is at best Marxish, begins to threaten entrenched power he finds literally the entire media apparatus of Great Britain aimed against him, with even the self-professedly progressive *Guardian* mostly sighing mournfully about how he's just too left-wing to ever take seriously. (And indeed, one of the things he's routinely attacked for is not being sufficiently supportive of the hereditary monarchy.) Perhaps it's true that "fascist" and "Nazi" remain more politically suicidal self-descriptors, but there's surely no standard by which "Marxist" doesn't round out your top three.

My point is not to suggest that one should construct a Marxist alternative to Moldbug, although I have to admit that does sound a lot more interesting than reading more Moldbug. Rather, it's that it's weird that Moldbug does not, at any point in his staggeringly vast corpus, seriously consider this. His engagement with Marxism consists of some snarky casual dismissals of its supposed incoherence. As an element of history, he treats it as part and parcel of the Cathedral, saying that the Cathedral's "desired end-state was a world order in which the Germans and Japanese were destroyed, the British and French severely weakened (and dependent on the US), and the US and USSR cooperated. That cooperation broke down - temporarily - after 1945, but the Brahmins indefatigably kept pursuing the golden dream of US-Soviet geopolitical cooperation, which eventually became known as 'detente'." Which describes the general effort in the 1980s to avoid incinerating the world in a nuclear fireball well enough, I suppose, though man, as political predictions made in 2008 go the coming age of US-Soviet geopolitical cooperation hasn't aged well.

And yet at every turn in Moldbug's argument, Marxism seems to lurk, indeed, haunt the text. Every argument he makes about the Cathedral's insidious suppression of the obviously preferable alternative has, to an even vaguely Marxist-familiar reader, an immediate counterpart pointing inexorably to the dictatorship of the proletariat. It is tempting to suggest that Moldbug is a failed Marxist in the sense that Jupiter is a failed star, its mass falling tantalizingly short of the tipping point whereby nuclear fusion begins. Over and over again, Moldbug asks questions much like those that Marx asked, and his answers begin with many of the same initial observations. But inevitably, a few steps in, he makes some ridiculously broad generalization or fails to consider some obvious alternative possibility, and the train of thought fizzles into characteristic idiocy.

The most obvious symptom of this is how rarely Moldbug actually takes a swing at Marx himself, despite the fact that he's self-evidently the biggest single villain of his philosophical system. It's not a pattern that's quite noticeable on the paragraph-to-paragraph level; it's just that when you do searches on his blog you discover that in the more than one million words he published as Mencius Moldbug he's mentioned Marx a mere hundred-and-thirteen, and that's including his uses of "Marxism" as a generic term of derision. And none of them constitute anything like an extended engagement with Marx's thought. Sure, you can argue that this isn't so much an oversight as a demonstration of contempt, but the fact remains - there's a confrontation

that's obviously waiting to happen that Moldbug endlessly deferred. (Hitler, by comparison, makes four hundred and sixty-nine appearances.)

Indeed, at one point late in his blogging career he proclaimed (not for the first time) that he was finally going to offer the red pill in a compact form before dramatically unfurling the statement "America is a communist country." He even reduces it to an acronym. "*AIACC* can be interpreted in countless ways," he proclaims. "All of these interpretations - unless concocted as an intentional, obviously idiotic strawman - are absolutely true. Sometimes they are obviously true, sometimes surprisingly true. They are always true. Because America is a communist country." And then, as you'd expect, he begins to go through various interpretations to show how they are either obviously idiotic or true. And yet there is one interpretation that, astonishingly, never seems to occur to him: "America is in some meaningful fashion run according to the philosophical principles of Karl Marx." In fact, literally none of the hundred-and-thirteen uses of the word Marx appear in the essay in question, "Technology, communism, and the Brown Scare."

Moldbug posted five more times on *Unqualified Reservations* after that essay, and then retired the pen name. These days, he dissociates from it actively, to the point of penning an essay under the name Curtis Yarvin in which he proclaims that he is not Mencius Moldbug. Thankfully (or, you know, not), neoreaction did not retire with Moldbug; indeed by the time he proclaimed that America was a communist country the future of the alt-right had already emerged. Which brings us to our third and in many ways strangest figure: Nick Land.

Land does not quite provide our desired Moldbug/Marx punch-up, nor does he provide anything so straightforward as a Moldbuggian commentary on Marx, or a Marxist reading of Moldbug. Instead he does something far weirder: he splits the difference. On the one hand, Land is the other pole of the neoreactionary movement proper (as opposed to the broader Rationalist movement that Yudkowsky represents) - his essay *The Dark Enlightenment* essentially forms a triptych of core works of the movement along with Moldbug's *Open Letter* and *Gentle Introduction*. On the other, he's an ex-academic philosopher steeped in the Marxist tradition. And this isn't anything so simple as a born-again conversion away from the leftist tradition, nor some sort of dull horseshoe theory that reveals the far-left and far-right to be closer to each other than the political center. No, this one's a deep rabbit hole indeed.

No matter how you slice it, though, *The Dark Enlightenment* is clearly where the trail starts. Its title, after all, immediately became a virtual synonym for the neoreactionary movement at large - it's the name of their subreddit, for

instance. But it's an astonishingly tricky essay, simultaneously addressing the leftist academic circles he used to travel in, to whom it serves as a deliberately scandalous "Dear John" letter, and addressing the already-existent neoreactionary movement. Indeed, for the most part *The Dark Enlightenment* serves as a summary of and commentary upon Moldbug.

This results in a strange and ambiguity-laden tone. Certainly, by and large, Land seems amenable to Moldbug. Consider, for instance, his summary of the Cathedral: "it is necessary to ask, rather, who do capitalists pay for political favors, how much these favors are potentially worth, and how the authority to grant them is distributed. This requires, with a minimum of moral irritation, that the entire social landscape of political bribery ('lobbying') is exactly mapped, and the administrative, legislative, judicial, media, and academic privileges accessed by such bribes are converted into fungible shares… The conclusion of this exercise is the mapping of a ruling entity that is the truly dominant instance of the democratic polity. Moldbug calls it the Cathedral." If anything, Land is prettifying Moldbug, layering in the pragmatic materialism that Moldbug's Austrian School instincts lead him to eschew.

And yet Land never actually comes out and endorses Moldbug in as many words. Indeed, there's a curious detail to Land's prose, in marked contrast with his subject. Where Moldbug's prose is awash with the first person, endlessly espousing his beliefs, Land, remains absent from *The Dark Enlightenment*, using the first person only once, in a rhetorical aside during one of his many bouts of hand-wringing around the subject of race. And so an actual statement that Moldbug is correct in his premises and conclusions is simply outside the domain of what Land's choice of styles and framings can offer in the first place. Certainly Land takes pains to be sympathetic to Moldbug, and he's explicitly positioned *Outside In*, the blog he started in the wake of *The Dark Enlightenment*, within the neoreactionary community. But even there his sympathies are manifestly tactical; an alliance formed for a more esoteric and never quite stated goal - one that he is at times ostentatious about refusing to discuss, a tendency that is in turns beguiling and infuriating.

Indeed, this speaks to a larger ambiguity around Land - something both his admirers and detractors, and for that matter both his old academic audience and his new neoreactionary one, debate and speculate upon. Simply put, nobody's quite sure if he's serious. I mentioned earlier how every one of Moldbug's arguments seems to have a secret Marxist double, a fact Moldbug is only dubiously aware of. Land has no such plausible deniability. His entire academic career, spent as part of the Cybernetic Culture Research Unit, a bunch of 90s cyberpunks loosely affiliated with the University of Warwick,

was based around subversive and postmodernist readings of texts in the spirit of writers like Gilles Deleuze. Joining a far-right Internet subculture in an Andy Kaufmanesque piece of philosophical performance art is 100% the sort of thing he'd do. If so, though, it's one played with an unwavering deadpan and nary a wink at the audience. All the same, it's important to understand not only that this ambiguity hangs over his work, but that Land knows it, and knows that you know it, and knows that you know that he knows it. And so on.

But it's also not all unwavering approval of Moldbug, especially once one starts to venture outside of *The Dark Enlightenment* and onto his blog, where Land expresses considerable skepticism towards Moldbug's prescriptions for a post-democratic society. And this points to a larger and more fundamental difference between Moldbug and Land: Moldbug is ultimately a utopian, whereas Land is a philosophical pessimist, and sees Moldbug as a perverse ally. To Land, what is most interesting about Moldbug is the fact he positions all of his calls for a restoration of monarchy within the libertarian tradition, libertarianism being a philosophy genuinely associated with a significant level of individualism. Early in *The Dark Enlightenment* Land makes note of libertarian icon Friedrich Hayek's insistence that he was an "Old Whig," which is to say, a true heir to the progressive tradition, in contrast with the progressives of his age, who have strayed from the true path, suggesting that "neoreaction" works as a similar formulation.

The point is not, however, to argue that Moldbug is a crypto-liberal. Rather, it is to suggest that liberalism is crypto-neoreactionary; that in the face of the reality of life under the Cathedral the neoreactionary position is the only logical response. Moldbug, in other words, represents the point where western liberalism finally owns up to its true nature. For Land, this is the right of exit, hence the first part of *The Dark Enlightenment* being titled "Neo-reactionaries head for the exit." In Land's view, what is interesting about Moldbug is that he reduces individual liberty to a right to say "no." This is the idea of negative liberty taken to a brutal teleology - literally nothing more than the right to pick whatever bit of the threat comes after "or you can," whatever the threat may be.

Once again, this is going to need some context in Land's larger career. In 1997, Land resigned his position at the University of Warwick. He subsequently moved to China, where he began his rightward turn, in part inspired by the degree to which he preferred Shanghai to Warwick. In other words, he is someone who exercised his right to exit, consciously deciding that

he preferred a more overtly authoritarian regime to the supposed comforts of a western liberal democracy.

But perhaps more significant is the way in which he did not exercise this right. I will be delicate here, and simply quote his colleague Robin Mackay about the endgame of Land's academic career: "Let's get this out of the way: In any normative, clinical, or social sense of the word, very simply, Land did 'go mad.'" Indeed, Land wrote about the experience in a piece called "A Dirty Joke" in which he talks about himself in a completely dehumanized fashion, calling himself "the ruin" and "it," and using the name "Vauung," which he explains he took "because it was unused, on the basis of an exact qabbalistic entitlement." The piece is genuinely chilling: "'This is a cool radio station,' it said to its sister. 'The radio isn't on,' its sister replied, concerned. Vauung learnt that the ruin's unconscious contained an entire pop industry. The ruin learnt that it had arrived, somewhere on the motorway. Nothing more was said about it. Why upset your family?"

Land positions this break at the endpoint of his philosophical inquiries; indeed, the *Fanged Noumena* collection that contains most of his pre-neoreactionary work ends with "A Dirty Joke," making that teleology explicit. And, significantly, it's a sensible endpoint. Land embraced a position of intense radicalism, driving himself deliberately to extremes such that it is impossible, reading his work linearly, to quite see where his madness becomes a corruption within it. His subject was always the violent destruction of the self - the idea that civilization was largely fucked, hurtling towards some awful end of its own making. His philosophical quest was always to find that end, and there's a real sense in which his neoreactionary turn is the process of him finding it, at least for himself, and then declining to take it.

There's an obvious echo of the "hit rock bottom and find Jesus" narrative here, and that's perhaps in practice unsurprising given that both Land and Moldbug are consciously trying to open a dialogue with existing right-wing politics, including those associated with an overtly evangelical Christian worldview. For Moldbug this is generally a bit awkward - he can't bring himself not to squawk about his atheism whenever God comes up. One of Land's major contributions to the neoreactionary community, on the other hand, is the construction of a compromise between the largely atheistic technolibertarian crowd Moldbug emerged from and the existing paleo-conservative traditions he increasingly found himself adopted by, an essay called "The Cult of Gnon." Gnon - arrived at after an extended riffing on the phrase "Nature or Nature's God" - is described by Land as "no less than reality, whatever else is believed. Whatever is suspended now, without delay, is

Gnon. Whatever cannot be decided yet, even as reality happens, is Gnon. If there is a God, Gnon nicknames him. If not, Gnon designates whatever the 'not' is. Gnon is the Vast Abrupt, and the crossing. Gnon is the Great Propeller."

But Gnon doesn't just bridge a cultural divide within the neoreactionary community - it serves as a crucial bridge within Land's own narrative. He does not talk at great length about his breakdown, and you can hardly blame him for it, but the overwhelming sense he gives is that he did not find God so much as find Gnon - an awful, inescapable realization about the way the world is.

It is here we finally turn to the notion of accelerationism alluded to at the outset, and set opposite the decelerationists we ostensibly don't give a shit about. See, the eschatological search that drove Land mad was not merely a matter of personal curiosity and excessive amphetamine usage, but an explicitly nihilist effort to bring about whatever eschaton necessarily awaited capitalism. This was, for Land, a distinctly different project than, say, the utopian project of Marxism - a project that, unlike Moldbug, Land actually understands. Whatever their critiques of what Land would eventually, following Moldbug, call the Cathedral, his colleagues retained hope for the existence of some alternative setup that would actually work well. Land believed no such thing existed, and that there was nothing to be done but get it over with, and indeed, accelerate it.

Crucially, Land's neoreactionary thought is also accelerationist - or, at least, his opposition to the Cathedral is. "Conceive what is needed to prevent acceleration into techno-commercial Singularity," he writes, "and the Cathedral is what it will be." Which makes sense - the Cathedral, after all, is defined as that which prevents Moldbug's claims from being persuasive (in a pragmatic, rather than ontological sense). If Moldbug is the tendency for liberalism to finally collapse into a singular right of exit, the Cathedral is what constantly promises false alternatives, stalling the inevitable endpoint. And to Land's mind, or at least to the mind of the character Land has been playing for the past several years, if the Cathedral is what's preventing the Singularity and neoreaction wants to smash the Cathedral, he's on team neoreaction.

It's actually not a completely awful line of thought. Certainly Land is vastly cleverer and more insightful than Yudkowsky or Moldbug, and I'm sure the rather more approving tone I've adopted these past two thousand words has not gone unnoticed by astute readers. And yet in the end the same preposterous and futile arrogance that fuels Yudkowsky and Moldbug is in full effect. Land may be more committed to a materialist view than Moldbug, and

he may do better at actually basing his conclusions on the evidence than Yudkowsky, whose literary Bayesianism leads him to equate gut intuition with actual numerical probabilities, but for all that he talks about worshiping at the black altar of undeniable reality, he's still falling for the old philosopher's trap of triumphantly proclaiming that he's got one weird trick to solve everything. Sure, his question is "how do we destroy the world" instead of "how do we save it," and that does deserve points for style, but let's face it: the claim that the bunch of racist dingbats that make up the neoreactionary scene are the fastest ticket to capitalist apotheosis is scarcely better than King Jobs. This sort of "the world can be saved if only everyone listens to me" narcissism belongs in the genre of fiction, where it can accomplish something, and not in the visionary manifesto, where it only reveals its own impotence.

II.

"1. Take 3 points in a plane to form a triangle, you need not draw it.
2. Randomly select any point inside the triangle and consider that your current position.
3. Randomly select any one of the 3 vertex points.
4. Move half the distance from your current position to the selected vertex.
5. Plot the current position.
6. Repeat from step 3." - Wikipedia, "Sierpinski triangle"

That's the outline of the territory sketched, then. Now to map the interior. Clearly there are no shortage of places to start or ground that we really ought to cover. For one, there is still the very large issue of race and neoreaction, which is the most self-evidently awful part of movement, and which deserves serious treatment instead of the flippancy with which I've thus far treated it. And, for that matter, about gender and neoreaction, which is just as big an issue. There's also the matter of the technofetishism common to Moldbug, Yudkowsky, and Land, that being the only real strand that links them besides being white men from anglophone countries, as well as being a jumping off point for a number of topics. There's also this strange business of lurking monsters - basilisks, Cthulhus, and shuddering voids of inescapable reality. And there's still the meta-question: how can we respond to the eschaton without the arrogance of thinking that we can change its speed or trajectory?

But let's instead think about the visionary manifesto and its aims. It is a performative genre - one where being interesting is as important as being right, if not slightly more so. That is not to say they can get away with being wrong, at least not straightforwardly so, but it is to reiterate that the key problem with Moldbug, Yudkowsky, and Land is that they are in key regards uninteresting - that they offer dull and unsatisfying answers to their most compelling questions, of which "hang out with a bunch of racist nerdbros" is merely the worst. A key aspect of this is that they are a fundamentally Luciferian genre. The manifesto differs from the plan in that it is oppositional. A plan is what you're going to do - a manifesto is what you're going to ignore to your peril. It shouts from the outside, demanding that key principles of the world be inverted. It is always motivated by the fact that everything you know is wrong.

If we are unsatisfied with these three writers, then, we ought consider what a counter-manifesto might look like. This is in many regards a tricky question. For one thing, as we've already noted, Yudkowsky, Moldbug, and Land do not form any sort of coherent singular position. But then, if what we're opposing

is the idea of a singular solution to the general problem of being fucked (and the assumption that we're fucked does rather preclude one) then we don't need to worry ourselves with the task of coming up with any one statement that serves as a decisive response to all three figures. It is enough to ask simply what an adequate response might be to any of the trains that run among their thoughts.

One obvious model comes from from Gilles Deleuze, one of Nick Land's major influences, who said of his own critical work, "I saw myself as taking an author from behind and giving him a child that would be his own offspring, yet at the same time monstrous." This is, ultimately, what Land argues that Moldbug does with the western liberal tradition, reducing the idea of individual liberty down to its purest form, a right to scream back "no" at the world, before finally concluding that we're too chicken to take it. So, with the Land-Moldbug axis being the strongest link we've found so far, let's ask what the monstrous offspring of neoreaction might look like. Or, to use a classical leftist slogan, it's time to fuck fascism.

The trick to this is one of parodic fealty - of taking premises further than their creators do, generally so as to demonstrate why they stopped where they did. This is what Moldbug does with libertarian thought, and the part of his argument that ultimately most resembles Peter Thiel's remarks about democracy. It's also what underlies my suggestion that the idea of the Cathedral undermines the narrative of endless leftward drift and in fact reveals Moldbug to be a mere puppet, with Marxism the true unspeakable alternative. But if we really want a neoreactionary bastard to enthrone we should just return to first principles: the red pill.

The reference, of course, is to *The Matrix*. The first thing to realize is simply the consistency of iconography. This is a movie about the transhumanist singularity dreamed of by Yudkowsky (albeit in a nightmarish, dystopian form), and steeped in the mirror-shaded aesthetic of cyberpunk in which Land did his early work. Neo, the computer programmer turned revolutionary mind-hacker, is self-evidently a fantasy aimed at people like Curtis Yarvin. There is a strain of technofetishism running through all of this so far that exists on a level far deeper than mere axiom.

The second thing to realize is that it's not incidental that the pill's a drug. The red pill reveals "how deep the rabbit hole goes," the *Alice in Wonderland* namecheck being a nod to a larger psychedelic tradition; note also the film's earlier invocation of *Alice in Wonderland* in the form of the White Rabbit, a scene that also suggests Neo's alienation from his dreamworld is comparable to mescaline. Moldbug's work is similarly awash with drug references, and

Land's is simply awash with the drugs themselves, his experimentalism having been as amphetamine-fueled as his breakdown. This is clearly a thing, and not entirely unrelated to the technofetishism: consider the cultural drift from Haight-Ashbury to Silicon Valley. For what it's worth, Yudkowsky very much busts the flush on this one, declaring that he has no interest in any mind-altering substances, including alcohol, although he does express interest in a pill to turn himself bisexual.

It is an ironic twist, given the cultural politics of psychedelia, that drugs should be a fundamentally authoritarian concept. But there is ultimately no way to avoid the conclusion. It's the entire point of Moldbug's red pill - the idea that the neoreactionary argument is an inevitable process, and that once you take the pill you cannot be unconvinced. Or consider Land's description of the process of being convinced by neoreaction: "the spirit of reaction digs its Sith-tentacles into the brain." (Yes, we're mixing our franchises now. Clearly our red pill's more a drug cocktail.) This isn't just a neoreactionary thing either - Land's imagery is only a few doors down from Terence McKenna's suggestion that DMT is an alien intelligence's attempt to communicate directly with the human brain, and we might also point at William S. Burroughs' allegorization of his heroin addiction into his paranoid world of linguistic control machines. My point here isn't some monstrous offspring of psychedelia; it's that psychedelic horror is a real historical phenomenon, and arguably much larger than the cuddly tie-dye psychedelia of popular culture.

Hell, just look at *The Matrix*, where the red pill trip literally goes through the looking glass, transitioning into the biomechanical body horror of Neo awakening in his pod, tentacular wires violating him and drilling orifices into his skin, his body pumped with nutrient sludge and sedatives. This is the drug's method of action literalized - an alien thing that plugs into our biology and reshapes our consciousness. And it is the very embodiment of the Cathedral - a sustained dream world that is western liberal democracy.

This brings us to the third thing to realize, which is that there are two pills: neoreaction's red pill and the Cathedral's blue. In popular conception, this is a freedom/bondage distinction - the psychedelic liberation of the red pill versus life as a sedated zombie via the blue pill. But we've already seen enough to recognize that the dualism's not that simple. It's more important that they're both drugs, and thus instruments of control, than that one is calling its form of control "freedom." And to its credit, *The Matrix* makes no bones about this. Conspicuously, it is the blue pill that is framed in terms of freedom and awakening ("you wake up in your bed and believe whatever you want to believe") and indeed in exit; it's the red pill that's described as a decision to

"stay in Wonderland." Indeed, the red pill is an agent of surveillance - once Neo takes it, it's revealed to be "part of a trace program… designed to disrupt your input/output carrier signal so we can pinpoint your location." Beat that for authoritarian control.

Though if we're counting drugs and not pills we're at three, not two. If a drug is an instrument of external control then the Matrix surely counts: it's an induced perception of reality, after all. Indeed, that's basically how it's presented to us when Neo wakes up, what with all those tubes pumping things into him. And while it might be tempting to simply equate the blue pill with the Matrix, they're clearly distinct - the blue pill is not what generates the perception of the Matrix, and comes from a completely different source - the Resistance - than the Matrix's creators.

One consequence of this realization is that the Cathedral ought be considered a drug, although that's going to require some serious unpacking, so let's set it aside for now. Of more immediate concern is the nature of the blue pill. Not, obviously, in the movie, where one assumes it's just a basic sedative, but in the larger sense of Moldbug's thought. When he first boasts of his red pill concept, he says, "we've all seen The Matrix. We know about red pills. Many claim to sell them. You can go, for example, to any bookstore, and ask the guy behind the counter for some Noam Chomsky. What you'll get is blue pills soaked in Red #3." In contrast with these "many" dyed blue pills, his red pill is one of a kind, raw and unfinished, with its famed sodium-metal core.

This is a key difference; in many ways the key difference between the two pills. The red pill only needs to be taken once, whereas the blue pill must be taken again and again. This is true, at least implicitly, within the film. The blue pill is waking up inside the Matrix and being "free" to assess your drug-addled perceptions and come to a conclusion about the nature of the world. This happens roughly every morning; indeed, by the time Neo's tripping balls and covered in mirror he's already done this three times in the film. Again, it's important to contrast the blue pill and the Matrix itself. The blue pill is taken repeatedly, whereas the Matrix is administered *continuously*; it is not "many" but "all."

It would, of course, be terribly bitchy to point out that Mencius Moldbug's verbose and multi-part blogging style is rather more resembling of the blue pill's method of administration than the red pill's. But then again, the fact that Moldbug hasn't got the goods was basically the first thing we noticed about him. Still, it's an important thing to realize: nothing about Moldbug's supposed red pill distinguishes it from Chomsky's. And I don't just mean Moldbug's verbosity, nor even the basic structure of Moldbug's blog, which he cops to,

quite reasonably pointing out that this is how blogs work. Rather it is the larger neoreactionary discourse - the myriad of blogs, subreddits, and Twitters that exist to endlessly spit out neoreactionary memes, evangelizing over and over again, generally to each other, but with especial vigor whenever they find anyone who expresses the slightest skepticism about the red pill's effects. The tone of these engagements is brilliantly satirized by David Malki's famed "The Terrible Sea Lion" comic, in which two women remark on how much they dislike sea lions only to be chased around by one for two days repeatedly demanding that they provide sources to back up their assertions. This constant restatement of an idea defined by the fact that it only needs to be expressed evokes Eve Sedgwick's observation of the conspiracy theorist's obsession with telling and retelling the story of their preferred conspiracy, as though they believe that if only their testimony is understood by the right person everything will be OK. ("Come on, Steve. Do you want to sell scraps of aluminum for the rest of your life, or do you want to come with me and change the world," one imagines Moldbug pleading.)

Moldbug, to his credit, is aware of this tendency, and offers an explanation. After a suitably florid build to the idea that the American government is an Orwellian mind control state, defined as one that is "existentially dependent on systematic public deception," he describes a red pill as "any stimulus or stimulant, pharmaceutical or literary, that fundamentally compromises said system of deception. That sounds very medical, but let's be clear: you are not taking our pill as a public service. At least with our present crude packaging, the remedy is not accessible to any politically significant percentage of citizens. Rather, you are dosing up because you'd rather be high. Despite the agony of ingestion, it's just too much fun to see your old reality from the outside. This, rather than 'society,' is why you will return to UR again and again." Tellingly, though, the "fun" of the red pill is based in part on its exclusivity. What's fun is seeing reality from the outside - in other words, watching all those silly little people who aren't clever enough to understand the red pill. Which is a fairly large problem: for the red pill to work, it requires that the neoreactionary have a ready supply of deluded people. In other words, the neoreactionary's sense of legitimacy is existentially dependent on systematic public deception.

As damning as this sounds, it's not actually that useful as an attack on neoreaction. The problem is that neoreaction basically already knows this, and is OK with it. That's the whole point of the right to exit - a final and decisive rescue of individual liberty at all costs. But exiting requires that people stay behind; if we all go, we'll just have to storm out again. The entire point of the project is to separate the wheat from the chaff. Most people, under Moldbug,

are likely to be slaves anyway. All the same, the point remains: Steve Jobs isn't going to be dismantling the Cathedral any more than he dismantled Grand Central Station or Covent Garden when he put Apple stores in.

No, what's really striking is Moldbug's repeated insistence on the "agony of ingestion." While a fair description of his writing style, it's rather hard to see what he actually intends it to refer to in terms of neoreaction. And this is clearly a definitional thing about the red pill. It doesn't just offer the truth; it offers the searing and traumatic truth. That's the entire point of Joe Pantoliano's character in *The Matrix*, who, having taken the red pill, has decided that the Matrix was his preferred drug after all, a position that is not so much refuted as set aside when its sole proponent is impaled. And Moldbug is visibly desperate to believe he's got it, despite the almost painful lack of agony.

But look, Moldbug isn't insincere. If he says the red pill is agonizing to swallow, we can safely assume that he, at least, thinks there's agony. So the question becomes: what, precisely, does Moldbug find agonizing in his own thought? This is closely related to the question of what his monstrous offspring looks like. What's the moment in his reasoning that he doesn't want to be there? He says that it's Part 9a of the *Gentle Introduction* which begins, after several parts not mentioning anything like the red pill at all, "Today you begin your irreversible descent into black, unthinkable madness." Oh boy! But let's continue with our "Moldbug is sincere" principle and assume that, after his eight part buildup, he really is delivering what he imagines to be the goods. Certainly Part 9a marks a turning point, as he explains it, between the first eight parts that explain "what history really is, and what it really has to teach us," and the finale that offers a program of action.

So what is the program of action? It's not, to be clear, putting Steve Jobs in charge; that's Moldbug's wish, but he isn't actually proposing it as a plan of action. Actually, Moldbug is being refreshingly realistic here, trying to come up with a program that can be enacted on an individual level. As he conceptualizes it, the idea is to be "political engineers" designing a backup system that will kick in when American democracy inevitably goes south. And the first step of this backup system is, as he puts it, becoming worthy, by which he means the embrace of a doctrine he calls passivism. He describes it thusly: "The steel rule of passivism is absolute renunciation of official power. We note instantly that any form of resistance to sovereignty, so long as it succeeds, is a share in power itself. Thus, absolute renunciation of power over USG implies absolute submission to the Structure."

And suddenly the abyss gazes also. Moldbug has stared into the truth of history, seen that it is a massive pack of lies designed purely to justify the corrupt status quo, and the only thing he can think to do about it is to submit entirely to the status quo. Make no mistake - he wants to burn it all down. He says, flatly, that he considers American democracy to be morally comparable to Nazi Germany, declaring that they are "both criminal regimes which history will rejoice to see abolished, because I feel that Washington can no less escape the crimes of Moscow than the Wehrmacht can escape the crimes of the SS." (We'll just leave be the idea that the crimes of Moscow are the worst of Washington's sins.) He wants desperately to be a revolutionary, but because he wants to rebel against the entire process of historical progress he has to forswear "demonstrations, press releases, suicide bombs, lawsuits, dirty bombs, Facebook campaigns, clean bombs, mimeographed leaflets, robbing banks, interning at nonprofits, assassination, 'tea parties,' journalism, bribery, grantwriting, graffiti, crypto-anarchism, balaclavas, lynching, campaign contributions, revolutionary cells, new political parties, old political parties, flash mobs, botnets, sit-ins, direct mail, monkeywrenching, and any other activist technique, violent or harmless, legal or illegal, fashionable or despicable." He abandons the term "citizen" in favor of "subject," accepting the irrevocable yoke of slavery. No wonder he's in terrified agony.

This is pretty much the exact moment that connects Moldbug to Land. And in some ways Land's version of it is the more persuasive, even as it's the less accessible. Moldbug visibly got there by having too much time on his hands and self-educating on American history entirely via primary source documents while stoned. Land, on the other hand, had a complete fucking breakdown. If someone took the proper red pill, it was Land, who clearly stared into some conceptual heart of darkness and saw the strange and alien light within. But either way, we've been through this patch before - what's key about the neoreactionary right to exit is once again that we realize at the last moment that we are too scared to take it.

Land has actually written about horror at some length; *Outside in* contains exactly two series of blog posts linked on its header, one called *Neoreaction*, the other *Abstract Horror*. This latter essay is also reprinted in his ebook *Phyl-Undhu*, the main content of which is a philosophical horror novella of that name. The story opens in Lovecraft pastiche - "Utter nullity. In the words of the ancient sages of ruined Ashenzohn, it was *the endlessness that ends in itself*. Dark silence beyond sleep and time, from whose oceanic immensities some bedraggled speck of attention - pulled out, and turned - still dazed at the precipitous lip, catches a glimmer, as if of some cryptic emergence from

eclipse. Then a sound, crushed, stifled, broken into gasps. Something trying to scream…" - and then transitions into a woman, Alison, waking up from a nightmare. Her first thought borders on an authorial self-insert: "madness is no escape." For my part, I should disclaim that I had already gotten to this part of the first draft of the book when I came upon the moment in *Phyl-Undhu* when a character, beginning a description of some philosophical argument that is an evident source of deep horror and disturbance for those who have contemplated it, says "everything starts from the end." I will not lie and say that I did not find this moment genuinely unsettling, which is of course the point of a work of philosophy that is about horror, and moreover a horror story that is about philosophy.

Philosophical horror - which Land has said he considers to be where he does his main work these days - is a genre that's been rigorously theorized by Eugene Thacker, an American philosopher a generation younger than Land, but working in many of the same traditions. Thacker, to be clear, is in no way a neoreactionist, and I suspect he would unhesitatingly and unambiguously repudiate the label and the bulk of the thought, if only on the principle that this is the null hypothesis when it comes to neoreaction. Nor is there direct influence between Thacker and Land, although each is aware of the other (Thacker has mentioned Land in an interview, and I just went ahead and asked Land on Twitter 'cause this paragraph looked weird without that symmetry). But they have many of the same influences and subjects - Land's major academic work of philosophy, for instance, was a monograph on Georges Bataille, who is also a major subject of Thacker's. To use a phrase from *Phyl-Undhu*, they share an Outside.

Thacker's relevant work, the three-volume *Horror of Philosophy* series, begins with the familiar eschatology: "the world is increasingly unthinkable - a world of planetary disasters, emerging pandemics, tectonic shifts, strange weather, oil-drenched seascapes, and the furtive, always-looming threat of extinction." He posits that in this situation the "absolute limit to our ability to adequately understand the world at all" becomes increasingly relevant, and observes that this is a frequent theme of both philosophy and horror. Indeed, Thacker argues that any work of philosophy can be read as a horror story, and vice versa, a claim he demonstrates in the latter two volumes of the set.

Thacker proceeds to use these connections to form a vocabulary of symbols and metaphors for talking about the present condition; an early section, for instance, analyzes the connotations of the word "black" in the genre of "black metal" at length, carefully parsing the notion of a forbidden, transgressive darkness between its Luciferian and pagan variations, then

constructing a third he calls "Cosmic Pessimism," framed in terms of Schopenhauer and Lovecraft, then repeats the analysis with ideas like demons and magic circles, constructing a rich and suggestive language of horror tropes to talk about the concept of the world-without-us - the world in which humanity is absent. Thacker uses the word Planet for this, in contrast to the Kantian idea of the experienced World to describe the weird and vast blackness of space and the infinitesimal scale of our particular rock and the fireplace it falls endlessly around.

Land invokes a similar notion in "Exterminator," which joins "Abstract Horror" in making up the backmatter of *Phyl-Undhu*. His term is the Great Filter, an idea he borrows from Robin Hanson, a libertarian economist who created the blog *Overcoming Bias* on which Yudkowsky got his start. Hanson, for his part, coined it in 1998 as part of an explanation for the Fermi Paradox. This paradox addresses the disjunction between our science fiction of interplanetary civilization and the observable evidence of an endless lifeless void surrounding us (despite extrasolar planets pretty much everywhere we look), and asks why this might be. It should be noted, this is not a particularly hard question to come up with good answers for. There are a preposterously large number of unknowns in it: the probability of civilized life evolving on a given habitable planet, the technological feasibility of interstellar travel, and the degree to which our ability to imagine alien life actually reflects the potential diversity of the phenomenon and thus whether we would recognize intelligent life if we saw it. Ultimately, what we know about the problem is simply that there doesn't seem to be anybody else out there.

Hanson, however, reframes the question in a more pressingly binary form. One way or another, there's something that keeps interstellar civilizations as we understand them from being common. As Hanson puts it in the abstract of his paper, "Humanity seems to have a bright future, i.e., a non-trivial chance of expanding to fill the universe with lasting life. But the fact that space near us seems dead now tells us that any given piece of dead matter faces an astronomically low chance of begating [sic] such a future. There thus exists a great filter between death and expanding lasting life, and humanity faces the ominous question: how far along this filter are we?" Or, to put it as he does in his chilling title, "The Great Filter - Are We Almost Past It?"

Land reconceptualizes the matter as "an absolute threat" that faces technologically adept civilizations. As he puts it, "the Great Filter does not merely hunt and harm, it exterminates… whatever this utter ruin is, it happens every single time. The mute scream from the stars says that nothing has ever

escaped it. Its kill-performance is flawless. Tech-Civilization death sentence with probability ~1." Like I said, let's assume that we're fucked.

Land also makes an argument along the same lines as Thacker in "Abstract Horror," which begins "when conceived rigorously as a literary and cinematic craft, horror is indistinguishable from a singular task: *to make an object of the unknown, as the unknown*." He subsequently frames it in terms that almost perfectly match Thacker's: "horror first encounters 'that' which philosophy eventually seeks to know." What is key about horror is its sense of mutation and monstrosity, a tendency he roots in Lovecraft's declaration that he chose to write "weird stories because they suit my inclination best - one of my strongest and most persistent wishes being to achieve, momentarily, the illusion of some strange suspension or violation of the galling limitations of time, space, and natural law which for ever imprison us and frustrate our curiosity about the infinite cosmic spaces beyond the radius of our sight and analysis." Lovecraft's sense of the Weird led him to assume a universe that was malevolently indifferent to humanity, populated by unfathomable horrors knowable only by analogies as bleak as they are oblique. Land's argument, in effect, is that the silent cosmos is exactly that - an unmistakable message that there is something wrong with us simply by virtue of our being a civilization.

But if we're going to talk about philosophy transmuting into a horror story, we've got a better example: Roko's Basilisk. Indeed, *Phyl-Undhu* makes a few cracks about this; Alison, the initial viewpoint character of the story, is a psychologist and cult deprogrammer dealing with an exile from a group of technofetishists that's blatantly modeled on Roko's falling out with the *LessWrong* community. (It is hardly the only such allegory in the story; later a character named Alex Scott expresses an argument about the Great Filter originally formulated by former *LessWrong* blogger Scott Alexander.) And no wonder - it really is a spectacular story.

Unfortunately, the Basilisk is also a story that's very difficult to frame in terms that make a lot of sense outside the bubble of Yudkowskian thought; the steps of the argument are, to an outside observer, all faintly ridiculous, their result more a silly thought experiment than a serious issue. What is important to remember, however, is that Yudkowsky's thought is in practice organized around his desire to achieve immortality by being reincarnated by a super-intelligent AI. Most of the steps along the path to Roko's Basilisk, idiosyncratic as they are, make at least some sort of sense when considered as premises adopted for that purpose.

The first and most straightforward weird premise is one that Yudkowsky establishes through some intense contortions of the many-worlds

interpretation of quantum mechanics, which is a belief that one ought treat any copies of one's self that exist in any possible future timelines not only as real, but as really being one's self to the extent that one should actually care what happens to one's hypothetical future duplicate. The means by which Yudkowsky reaches this are obscure; he explicitly cites it as one of those things that won't make sense to the unenlightened masses. But the appeal of the conclusion is obvious: it allows the utopian vision to apply directly to the present day in spite of the profound and potentially insoluble technological barriers between us and strong AI.

The second and more bewildering premise is actually something of a locus of related premises, all of them having to do with the idea of perfectly predicting someone or something's behavior. This is a notoriously tricky premise to introduce into rational analysis, leading to all sorts of oddities like Newcomb's Paradox, a thought experiment similar to the Prisoner's Dilemma that's of mild but significant interest within analytical philosophy, but that Yudkowsky is weirdly obsessed with. One of these oddities, Yudkowsky suggests, is the idea of acausal trade, which claims that it is meaningfully possible to negotiate with a future superintelligent AI if it can predict your actions and you can predict its. The latter of these may seem deeply improbable given that a superintelligent AI is by definition a profoundly alien being that does not think like humans, but remember that we only got here because of a ridiculously inflated sense of our own rationality. Indeed, the former of these may seem vastly improbable if you are inclined to believe that humans are not in fact predictable in any absolute sense, which may actually be the more substantial objection. But for better or for worse (well, for worse, as Roko is about to demonstrate) Yudkowskians believe both fervently, which again makes sense from an external perspective in that it allows them a form of communion with their desired futuristic AI. Or, as Land put it when parodying them in *Phyl-Undhu*, "the End is a Thing, and an Intelligence… and we can converse with it."

The awful interaction of these two premises comes when Roko imagines, as he puts it, "the ominous possibility that if a positive singularity does occur, the resultant singleton may have precommitted to punish all potential donors who knew about existential risks but who didn't give 100% of their disposable incomes to x-risk motivation." The logic here is that a friendly AI that wants to save humanity from itself would want to make sure it comes into being, and so would try to ensure this by threatening to take anyone who imagined its existence and then failed to bring it about and torture a simulation of them for all eternity, which, due to the Yudkowskian interpretation of the many-worlds

hypothesis, is equivalent to torturing the actual person. And so upon thinking of this AI you are immediately compelled to donate all of your income to trying to bring it about.

This is genuinely funny, but it's important to stress that it was also *genuinely terrifying* for some people. Indeed, even Yudkowsky was visibly rattled by it, furiously replying to Roko's post suggesting this idea by saying "Listen to me very closely, you idiot. YOU DO NOT THINK IN SUFFICIENT DETAIL ABOUT SUPERINTELLIGENCES CONSIDERING WHETHER OR NOT TO BLACKMAIL YOU. THAT IS THE ONLY POSSIBLE THING WHICH GIVES THEM A MOTIVE TO FOLLOW THROUGH ON THE BLACKMAIL," a passage Land memorably refers to as "among the most gloriously *gone* texts of modern times." And Roko, to be clear, understood the degree to which this was a genuinely dangerous train of thought, noting in his post that "one person at SIAI [the previous name of MIRI] was severely worried by this, to the point of having terrible nightmares." It was, in other words, a concrete demonstration of Thacker's point - a philosophy that realized its own horror story and freaked the fuck out at it. Indeed, Roko himself was deeply upset by his own train of thought, leaving the *LessWrong* community, subsequently declaring that he wished he "had never learned about any of these ideas" or "come across the initial link on the internet that caused me to think about transhumanism and thereby about the singularity," a statement that Land uses almost exactly in *Phyl-Undhu* when Alison says of her technocultist patient that "he wants to have not thought certain things."

It's an awful, snarled contradiction; a desire whose recognition frustrates itself. It's familiar to Land as well, of course. To most people, I suspect. The awful, dawning realization that we're fucked: that civilization faces a terminal decline, and that the human project is pure folly. Which is, of course, just the point he makes about the Great Filter/Exterminator. But in *Phyl-Undhu* Land offers a slightly different take. "Exterminator" ultimately suggests that this horror be conceived of in abstract terms: "it is the highly probable fact that we have yet to identify the greatest hazards, and this threat unawareness is a structural condition, rather than a contingent deficiency of attention." Or, as he puts it more succinctly, "unknown unknowns cosmically predominate." We don't understand what's wrong. *Phyl-Undhu*, on the other hand, is ultimately all too clear, offering a more or less materialist account of the inevitability of social collapse. Where "Exterminator" points to an unknowable world, *Phyl-Undhu* suggests an altogether too obvious world based on the most banal of historical observations: every civilization faces a decline and fall, and every species goes extinct.

But crucially, this is not a new realization for Land, which is to say, it was not something that he came to understand while going mad. He was making claims like "capital is a social suicide machine" a quarter-century ago. The realization that the endgame of the societal project is death is not a new one for him. Which is to say that he's being cheeky in *Phyl-Undhu*, selling philosophical pessimism to a readership that thinks it's edgier and more shocking than it is. And fair play to him, it is the most convincing bit of red dye on display among the neoreactionaries.

But let's turn back to Moldbug, simply because we haven't done the whole "horror" thing with him yet, nor even produced a decent monstrous offspring. Thacker describes the process of horror-philosophy as arising from the way in which philosophers grapple with doubt, saying that "every philosopher negates something in the world or about the world - a presumption, an article of faith, what passes as common sense. But this negation always paves the way for a further affirmation, a claim about how things really are." Certainly Moldbug adheres to this description, endlessly negating the common sense of Enlightenment liberalism. But the turn towards horror comes with "the possibility of a 'no' that never leads to a 'yes,' a 'no' that must, as a consequence, devolve upon and devour itself, leading to paradox and contradiction."

For Moldbug it's clear that the swerve away from negation comes at the point where he foreswears all activism in favor of a doctrine of passivism, which he describes saying, "The passivist does not rebel against USG, because he has not the right to do so; he has not the right to do so, because he has not the power to do so." And with that, for all his protestations about the horrors of western democracy and USG, he accepts his slavery. Yes, he subsequently forms his "plan B" that will step in when western liberalism collapses under its own contradictions, but at that point it's literally "meet the new boss, same as the old boss." The point where his "no" becomes a "yes" is ultimately the belief that power is inherently legitimate.

What, then, if he said no again? To be fair to him, there are moments where he just about contemplates this possibility, although in an almost deliberately facile way that prevents him from having to take it seriously. For instance, in his blog post "A Formalist manifesto" he declares that "you're bound by a rule if, and only if, you agree to it. We don't have rules that are made by the gods somewhere. What we have is actually not rules at all, but agreements." And he follows this to a logical endpoint, saying that "if you're a wild man and you agree to nothing - not even that you won't just kill people randomly on the street - this is fine. Go and live in the jungle, or something.

Don't expect anyone to let you walk around on their street, any more than they would tolerate, say, a polar bear." But the gaps in this are numerous. The most obvious gap is in Moldbug's rather limited conception of the wild man. The real danger is not a man who refuses to stop killing people randomly in the street, a problem that might prove challenging to excessively purist philosophical doctrines, but which societies in practice are pretty good at dealing with. No, the real danger is a man who refuses to *commit* to not killing people, but who is not presently actually doing so. Or, more broadly, the man whose agreement exists at an oblique angle to society; something more compatible with it than a polar bear, but less than Moldbug's submission to the powers that be.

Indeed, one can push this line of thought further and arrive at a position not entirely unlike Roko's Basilisk for Moldbug, in that it involves constructing an unpleasant but plausible sort of authority. If power is as power does then any force that can successfully imitate power is a legitimate power. Which brings us neatly to what happens if we look at passivism and offer another "no." This does not, of course, mean embracing any traditional sense of activism; that's a decelerationist's approach. But it does mean skipping straight to the end and simply taking over the world.

The tactics one uses don't really matter. One approach that Moldbug is perpetually afraid to acknowledge is of course religious. Moldbug makes a great show of redefining the American government to be a religion in the form of the Cathedral, but after doing so he discards the traditional manifestation, save for when he says things like "we don't have rules that are made by the gods somewhere," which may be true in terms of absolute metaphysics, but is obviously false in terms of material politics. The truth is that the guy who says that he knows what God wants is never a bad bet in terms of who's going to be running things. But there's a second, blunter approach that perhaps more accurately captures the Basilisk's stony gaze, which is that in a worldview where legitimate power is defined as power that is successfully applied, there's no legitimate authority quite like the men with guns who kick down your door in the middle of the night. Moldbug repeatedly reiterates that he abhors such violence, but for all Moldbug imagines a system that ascends to power because of its own self-evident perfection, the reality is that his system is profoundly vulnerable to the phenomenon of people declaring themselves to be in charge and offering unpalatable but undeniably compelling terms.

Which brings us to Hitler. As Land observes in "The Dark Enlightenment," "Hitler perfectly personifies demonic monstrosity,

transcending history and politics to attain the stature of a metaphysical absolute: evil incarnate. Beyond Hitler it is impossible to go, or think." Moldbug, for his part, ties himself in knots to come to the conclusion that yes, sure, the Nazis were reactionaries, but they were rubbish at it and too influenced by democracy. But in many ways this undersells the true conceptual horror of Nazi Germany, which is not merely, as Moldbug suggests, its human rights record, but the fact that Hitler was *a complete fucking nutcase*. The dirty little secret about *Mein Kampf* is that it's relentlessly and mind-wrenchingly awful in a way that makes Moldbug look like a towering literary and intellectual genius. And he was one of the more together Nazis; people like Goebbels and Himmler were deranged incompetents of the highest order.

And yet Hitler did quite well. The whole Nazi team did, really. I mean, yes, sure, they were vanquished and turned into a signifier for the absolute endpoint of human moral depravity, which is a pretty emphatic defeat as such things go, but when you think about how mindbendingly inept they were it starts to seem more impressive that they were ever enough of a threat to be enshrined as such an extreme negation of western society. The implications of this are profound, if only to the degree which they mark a sobering reminder of how perverse a Muse Kleio can be. But they also pose a significant problem for any political philosophy: how do you deal with the fact that history can fuck up that hard?

It is not, obviously, that Moldbug does not have answers to that question. Quite the contrary, it's the question that most obsesses him; he just happens to take the Founding Fathers as his fuckups of choice. But I bring this up because the unfortunate reality is that the people who flocked to Moldbug and Land are exactly the sort of morons Hitler makes you worry about. Or, to put it more bluntly, neoreactionaries are vicious little shits. Let's just illustrate that in the most rawly practical terms by pulling up /r/darkenlightenment, the neoreactionary subreddit named after Nick Land's essay, and see what the movement's interested in this evening. At the top of the page is a piece about the November 2015 Paris attacks titled "More Paris Attacks: Preparing Ourselves for Liberal Apologetics for Muslim Crimes" that talks about how Muslims and black people are just inherently more violent than other people and can't possibly integrate. Below the fold: an anti-immigration piece from the *Telegraph,* a piece bemoaning how white people at the University of Missouri are afraid of being called racists, a piece called "Increasing Diversity => Fascism," and a piece about how women, homosexuals, and the working class are "false tribes" in contrast to real tribes like race and nationality. Further down, pieces about "show trials" to enforce Title IX and a piece about

how more young American women are living with their families than before, with comments debating whether this is proof of how many immigrants there are in America or because "women's liberation" (scare quotes from the comment) has been bad for women. Elsewhere, skepticism about global warming.

Pleasant sorts, clearly. And the vicious little shit qualities of your garden variety neoreactionary are very much part of the point, at least for Nick Land. In part 4d of "The Dark Enlightenment" he constructs an extended metaphor around the word "cracker," in its sense "as a slur targeting poor southern whites of predominantly Celtic ancestry," describing them as "grit in the clockwork of progress," and as Qabbalistic forces of "schism or secession" based on the power of cracks "to widen, deepen, and spread." His meaning is clear: racist hicks are awesome forces of abstract horror. He tacitly reiterates this in *Phyl-Undhu*, which notes, in a variety of ways, that strong tribal affiliations and hostility to outsiders is likely the soundest survival tactic in most practical eschatons.

He may well be right in this, although one gets the sense that he's rather glad not to be a part of that American culture; elsewhere in the labyrinthine Part 4 of "The Dark Enlightenment" he remarks fondly about how "there is no part of Singapore, Hong Kong, Taipei, Shanghai, or very many other East Asian cities where it is impossible to wander, safely, late at night. Women, whether young or old, on their own or with small children, can be comfortably oblivious to the details of space and time, at least insofar as the threat of assault is concerned." Meanwhile, when speaking of the folks he's nominally fascinated by these days he says, "since stereotypes generally have high statistical truth-value, it's more than possible that crackers are clustered heavily on the left of the white IQ bell-curve, concentrated there by generations of dysgenic pressure." Indeed, it's tough to seriously argue that Land's sense of horror at crackers doesn't have the same relationship to garden variety intellectual snobbery that Moldbug's insistence that making a good slave isn't a bad thing has with racism.

Instead, it always seems as though he views the bulk of neoreactionaries as a sort of Petri dish in which he can observe the spasming collapse of the technosingularity. Perhaps they are a suitable microcosm. But in this regard, at least, Moldbug has a point. In the "Gentle Introduction," he praises the 18th century loyalist Massachusetts judge Peter Oliver, essentially suggesting that reactionaries like him are better than revolutionaries like John Adams because Oliver "is a man you could have a beer with." And he notes, "you can't actually have a beer with Peter Oliver, but you can read his book." The truth is that,

despite Land's evident fascination with them, the bulk of neoreactionaries are not people one would want to have a beer with, and there's not a great case for reading their books either.

But if I might be so bold as to suggest, there are other ways of saying "no" at this point in the argument that don't require hanging out with banal edgelords who get off trying to see how close to saying "Hitler was right" you can actually get without losing the ability to semi-credibly (at least to other reactionaries) say "but I'm not a Nazi or anything" afterwards. Indeed, when it comes to recasting philosophy as horror it is safe to say that the sort of immediate lurch to the most dramatic form of negation to hand is in most regards the least interesting - a point Moldbug is consistently deficient on. The obvious truth of horror philosophy is that there's an aesthetic; one based on a tightrope balance between the initial "yes" that one is fleeing from and the eventual "yes" that interrupts the series of "nos." Tzvetan Todorov, in theorizing the genre of the Fantastic, describes a specific iteration; an extended ambiguity between the possibility that the protagonist is mad and the possibility of the supernatural. The story balances between the horrors of madness and the Other, drawing out the act of settling on one of the two available "yeses." But the specific chasms on either side are in the end less important than the awful and sustained gravity of them. That's the point of the horror story. And by just taking as hard a negation as possible, which is what the bulk of actual neoreaction amounts to, one largely fails at this aesthetic.

III.

"The earth is a bitch, we've finished our news. Homo Sapiens have outgrown their use. All the strangers came today, and it looks as though they're here to stay." - David Bowie, "Oh You Pretty Things!"

Let's return to the Basilisk, shall we? After all, it meets Todorov's definition perfectly. The person tormented by it is either in the thrall of a force reaching back through time or they are suffering from a fundamental error of reasoning. The former is clearly supernatural, the latter madness. More than that, however, Yudkowsky's explicit valuation of "rationality" firmly allies him with the essential qualities of a protagonist in a Todorov-style Fantastic tale. The fundamental horror of the "supernatural vs madness" tension is that both represent the failure of reason, madness in the form of its disintegration, the supernatural in the form of its inadequacy. That neither would happen was always the fundamental promise of Yudkowsky's system: Bayes' theorem was supposed to save us from error and the unknown. And so the intrusion of the Fantastic in the form of Roko's Basilisk represents an unusually poignant threat.

But in looking at Yudkowsky this way a different sort of concern becomes clear; one that helps to clarify the connection between him and Moldbug. When read in terms of Todorov, Yudkowsky becomes visible as an attempt to escape a form of irrationality. In some ways this is obvious; his two main blogging projects, after all, were called *Overcoming Bias* and *LessWrong*. He has always positioned himself as a vanquisher of error. But unlike Moldbug, who is very explicit about the error he seeks to vanquish, Yudkowsky is nominally vaguer. His major works tend to start with the human bias towards optimism, which is a fair enough target; as I said, let us assume that we are fucked. But this is only a starting point, and he obviously goes much further. Indeed, in a very fundamental sense it is simply error itself he is afraid of, in much the same way that Land is afraid of the radically unknown.

But there's another angle that must be considered. Just as we approached the premises of Roko's Basilisk with an eye towards understanding what purpose they served, let us approach the question of what sort of error Yudkowsky is fleeing from a pragmatic standpoint. As with most things regarding Yudkowsky, it is worth recalling that he is an autodidact who was manifestly ill-suited to the American education system. I will admit that I was merely the bright kid who annoyed his teachers a fair amount, but I can still speak with some authority and say that the overwhelmingly characteristic

experience of this state of affairs is the experience of being furiously, impotently aware that someone with power over you is massively and fundamentally *wrong* about something.

Indeed, Yudkowsky writes a compelling account of this experience in *Harry Potter and the Methods of Rationality*, one of the more blatant moments of using Harry as an authorial mouthpiece. At one point, Professor McGonagall expresses concern based on the way Harry acts that he might have been abused, which Harry angrily refutes, offering the following alternative explanation for why he is the way he is: "I'm too smart, Professor. I've got nothing to say to normal children. Adults don't respect me enough to really talk to me. And frankly, even if they did, they wouldn't sound as smart as Richard Feynman, so I might as well read something Richard Feynman wrote instead. I'm isolated, Professor McGonagall. I've been isolated my whole life. Maybe that has some of the same effects as being locked in a cellar. And I'm too intelligent to look up to my parents the way that children are designed to do. My parents love me, but they don't feel obliged to respond to reason, and sometimes I feel like they're the children - children who won't listen and have absolute authority over my whole existence. I try not to be too bitter about it, but I also try to be honest with myself, so, yes, I'm bitter. And I also have an anger management problem, but I'm working on it. That's all."

Yes, it's clear that Yudkowsky is, at times, one of the most singularly punchable people in the entire history of the species; and to be fair, *Harry Potter and the Methods of Rationality* is unequivocal about the fact that Harry is. But there's something genuinely moving about this passage, and moreover that something is a fundamental part of Yudkowsky's appeal. Indeed, it's in some ways the most basic similarity between him and Moldbug: they are both animated by an entirely sympathetic anger that people with power are making stupid, elementary errors. But what's really important is how this sheds light on what exactly Yudkowsky is fleeing from, and in turn on why the Basilisk is the monster lurking at the heart of his intellectual labyrinth. Yudkowsky isn't just running from error; he's running from the idea of authority. The real horror of the Basilisk is that the AI at the end of the universe is just another third grade teacher who doesn't care if you understand the material, just if you apply the rote method being taught.

As many have noted, Roko's Basilisk shares numerous structural similarities to the 17th century argument Pascal's Wager, which is generally described as an argument for why you should believe in God, but can also fairly be called a philosophical horror story about mathematics. Its historical significance is based on the way in which it's situated not just in Pascal's religious philosophy

but in his work as one of the pioneers of the field of probability, which he worked on with Pierre de Fermat, following the 16th century work of Gerolamo Cardano. But what is key is the particular vision of God that Pascal had to turn to in order to spring his trap. Probability had proven tremendously effective at banishing the peculiar gods of gamblers' superstitions; a feat gestured to in the very name Pascal's Wager, but in doing so it opened the door to a singularly nasty view of God that amounts to the theological equivalent of the men with guns who kick down your door at 3am. The similarities to Yudkowsky's form of rationality, based as it is in a more contemporary theory of probability than Pascal's prototypical one, are pronounced, right down to the authoritarian horror of the God we are rationally obliged to bow to.

Moldbug junkies requiring further hits of red pill after exhausting all fourteen parts of the *Open Letter* and all eleven existent parts of the *Gentle Introduction* generally turn to the seven-part "How Dawkins Got Pwned." The initial thesis of this work is that atheist public intellectual Richard Dawkins is in fact a "Christian atheist." This may seem like a fairly obvious claim, not least because Dawkins has described himself both as a "secular Christian" and as a "cultural Christian," but it is more interesting than it sounds for two reasons. First, Moldbug made the claim a few months before Dawkins did, a fact that is almost surely coincidence, but nevertheless does count as a rare moment of actual insight on Moldbug's part. Second, Moldbug, in a passage quoted at length by Land in "The Dark Enlightenment," narrows his taxonomy down further, proclaiming that "Dawkins is not just a Christian atheist. He is a Protestant atheist. And he is not just a Protestant atheist. He is a Calvinist atheist. And he is not just a Calvinist atheist. He is an Anglo-Calvinist atheist. In other words, he can be also described as a Puritan atheist, a Dissenter atheist, a Nonconformist atheist, an Evangelical atheist, etc, etc.," going on to further tag him as a Ranter, Leveller, Digger, Quaker, and Fifth Monarchist. Moldbug's usual problems with the genetic fallacy abound here, but there's something to it: Dawkins doesn't believe in any gods, but it's the Anglican God he's most invested in disbelieving.

A similar line of thought can be applied to Roko's near-flawless recreation of Pascal's Wager, and leads to the same broad theological attributions, namely the European Protestant tradition. And indeed, there is a degree to which this marks the fundamental schism between Moldbug and Yudkowsky, who he actually calls out by name in the course of "How Dawkins Got Pwned," and even explicitly accuses of the same error as Dawkins in a blogpost titled "Interstitial comments on Dawkins." And that error, to be clear, is being a

Puritan/Dissentist/Nonconformist, a group Moldbug bluntly describes as "freaks" whose influence in the present day should be regarded as "a sign of imminent apocalypse" and whose defeat following the death of Oliver Cromwell was "frankly, a damned good riddance." Indeed, Moldbug's chosen political affiliation, the Jacobites, were explicitly a reaction against the values of the Puritans when they reemerged a generation later in the form of the Glorious Revolution. (Ironically, Moldbug and Yudkowsky are, in practice, culturally Jewish atheists.)

Given all of this, then, there is an interesting moment in the *Open Letter* that is helpful in unveiling a different sort of negation for Moldbug. In the fourth part, after proclaiming himself a Jacobite, he quotes the Jacobite thinker Samuel Johnson's quip that "the first Whig was the Devil." Moldbug proposes to unpack that, saying, "What does it mean that the "Devil was the first Whig?" What do you think of when you think of the Devil? I always think of Mick Jagger. Surely we can agree that the Devil rode a tank, held a general's rank, when the Blitzkrieg raged and the bodies stank. What Dr. Johnson is proposing is that the Adversary clapped at the Putney Debates, that he smeared his face and shook his tomahawk on the Dartmouth, that he leered and cackled as he swore the Tennis Court Oath. Not that it's a short song, but I don't recall these bits."

Even for Moldbug, this is weak. That Samuel Johnson was not thinking of Mick Jagger when he made his 1778 remark is reasonably obvious, but within the realm of poetic license. That he was also not thinking of the Tennis Court Oath, sworn by members of the Third Estate in the earliest days of the French Revolution in 1789, looks perhaps more like sloppiness. But the really big oversight is the fact that when Samuel Johnson, one of the great Milton scholars of his or any other age, said that the Devil was the first Whig he almost certainly just meant it as an allusion to *Paradise Lost*, a point hammered home in the relevant passage of *The Life of Johnson* when Boswell replies by quoting Satan's famous declaration that it is "Better to reign in Hell, than serve in Heaven."

It is not that Moldbug is unaware of Milton. Indeed, he obligingly quotes the "reign in hell" bit at the end of Part Four. But he completely avoids actually engaging with this meaning, using Johnson as a frame, with the bulk of Part Four consisting of a typically Moldbuggian ramble about how America is secretly communist and all that, only swerving back to Johnson at his conclusion to proclaim that "all the principles of Whigs, even those which seem austere and noble, are consistent with the objective of seizing power." This is not, to be clear, a case of misunderstanding Johnson, nor even of

Milton. The claim that Milton's Satan espouses a basically liberal view of the world is a common reading of *Paradise Lost*, as is the observation that Satan is a figure of greed and vanity. Aside from the bits about communism Moldbug is basically on point about Johnson's meaning.

No, the problem is that Moldbug doesn't understand the fact that Johnson's comment is a vicious barb lobbed at Milton, who was a republican and Cromwell supporter of exactly the sort that Moldbug hates. In suggesting that it is Satan who best represents the Whiggish view and not, as one would expect given Milton's posthumous adoption by the Whigs, the God whose ways Milton seeks to justify to men, Johnson is in effect saying that Milton's magnum opus collapses under its own weight. In fact, this is one of the most venerable rabbit holes in literary criticism, occupying generations of Milton scholars. At its most elemental level the problem is this: *Paradise Lost* repeatedly asserts that God is right and Satan is evil, and yet Satan is self-evidently the best character in it.

To be fair, this is simply not the sort of problem Moldbug is interested in. He's not a literary scholar, and if he's going to dive into old books it's going to be arcane political pamphlets, not theological poetry, and especially not theological poetry from a fucking Dissenter. The trouble is that he should be interested in it, because *Paradise Lost* is a much harder and richer problem than the ones Moldbug likes to tackle. Indeed, to use his parlance, it's a problem that would have pwned him.

Let's start by framing the problem in the most Moldbug-friendly way we can, which is to say as Johnson would have understood it, although it's going to quickly slither out of such an easy grasp. For Johnson, Milton was the honorable opposition. He was venerable enough to be one of the sources Johnson turned to most in his *Dictionary of the English Language*, but he was also a figure who needed to be actively rebelled against. On a stylistic level, Johnson objected to his use of blank verse and excessive allusions; on a personal level, he disdained the Puritan and republican ideas within. So the claim that the Devil was the first Whig is, for Johnson, a sneaky reclamation of Milton from his own politics. If it is Satan who best espouses the political views of Milton's followers within *Paradise Lost* then Milton becomes a crypto-Tory, illustrating through God's triumph the reasons why absolute monarchy is superior to Whiggish liberalism. That's why it's such an effective bon mot.

Well, that and the fact that it's actually a pretty fair characterization of *Paradise Lost*. Milton's vision of God is very much in the authoritarian tradition of Pascal and Yudkowsky - a figure defined by his offer of a strictly binary deal between salvation and damnation. And what's crucial about Milton's God

is that it's an active offer on his part: he creates the situation whereby one is damned or saved. As he puts it, speaking of Satan's fall, "whose fault? Whose but his own? Ingrate, he had of me all he could have; I made him just and right, sufficient to have stood, though free to fall. Such I created all the ethereal Powers And Spirits, both them who stood, and them who fail'd; freely they stood who stood, and fell who fell." Freedom is something granted by a sovereign God, whose sovereignty is an inherent condition of the universe, a fact emphasized by the way that, following the fifty-four line speech by God about how free he made man and how man is the author of its own destiny, Milton offers a description of how "while God spake, ambrosial fragrance fill'd all Heaven, and in the blessed Spirits elect sense of new joy ineffable diffus'd." Or, to put it another way, God's farts, like the King's, smell like roses.

Actually, what's really surprising here is just how Moldbuggian this all sounds. The freedom to stand or fall is visibly just the right to exit as imposed by King Jobs, rightful sovereign of California. God's ambrosial fragrance is no more or less than the ultimate Formalist account of rightful power. Never mind being a crypto-Tory, Milton's a crypto-neoreactionary. There's only one teensy little problem: Milton's God is a dick.

The key moment comes in the middle of the fifty-four line speech, when God attempts to justify the basic decision to give man free will. Which is, after all, a fair question. Asking rhetorically what would have happened if he had not made man free, God asks, "what praise could they receive? What pleasure I from such obedience paid." The choice of words is genuinely chilling: pleasure. The choice to kneel or exit is imposed for no reason other than because the sovereign desires to be obeyed. This is raw sadism. It's the sort of thing Moldbug accuses Whigs of when he says "the Whig is concerned with his own power rather than with the state of society." Except, wait, the Devil's supposed to be the Whig here.

One imagines that Moldbug would not be particularly troubled by this knot. Milton's a Dissenter, after all - that he can't take the side of God or the Devil without his awful greed for power showing only proves it. But we're literally talking about the book that invented the Devil as a figure by unifying the serpent in Genesis, the ruler of Hell, and the occasional figure in Christian mythology of an angel cast down from heaven into a coherent single vision. It's not a minor question. Nor is it one that's irrelevant to our larger project. Milton's God is visibly based in the same malevolence that makes Roko's Basilisk and the men with guns who kick down your door at 3am so awful. In many ways it is the option that's even worse than the Exterminator, which is at least indifferent as opposed to sadistic.

But more than that, it's a question Moldbug's at least kind of on the hook for, whether he wants to be or not. After all, the corollary to his claim that Dawkins is a Dissenter atheist is that he himself is a Jacobite one. He's still firmly enmeshed in the exact same Christian tradition as Dawkins; he's just picked the other side of one particular 18th century political divide. Which is to say that this vision of God as a sovereign authority matters to Moldbug. Especially because, let's face it, Moldbug's beloved English monarchy was exactly what it was designed to be a legitimizing myth for. God and the King look the same for a reason, and it's not because Henry VIII was Yahweh's problematic fave. So our hypothetical Moldbug can't just call all of this Dissenter heresy and be done with it, even if Milton's not his cup of tea.

Moldbug's system has an obvious fix available for the problem. Sure, the particular iteration of the sovereign that the Dissenter freak John Milton cooked up is a sadistic pervert, but there's a mechanism available for that, whether it be the tidy corporate maneuvering of Moldbug's system or just a good old-fashioned "hunting accident." And if the situation's well and truly fucked, well, there's always the right of exit. The thing is, Milton's thought of these exact same things, and has had Satan do all of them. That's literally the plot of *Paradise Lost*: Satan tries to kill God, then leaves to set up his own kingdom. Which is to say, and this is actually fairly obvious when you think about it, it's possible that a bunch of people who are calling themselves Dissenters are prepared for the possibility that there are some people who are going to call them heretical freaks.

In other words, let's assume that Milton is well aware that he gave the Devil what he considered to be a reasonably compelling argument, which is to say, one based on his own proto-Whiggish beliefs, and is similarly aware that his vision of a superior argument, as espoused by God, is going to prove repulsive to royalist scum like Johnson and Moldbug. From this perspective, Johnson's claim that the Devil is the first Whig becomes little more than a horror reading already implicit in Milton's deliberate decision to cast the Devil as the first reactionary. Which is to say that even if Moldbug isn't terribly interested in Milton, Milton can still be read as very much interested in Moldbug, and indeed as having plausibly anticipated the bulk of Moldbug's arguments.

Let us, experimentally, put Milton's Devil at the black heart of Moldbug's philosophical labyrinth. I do not, to be clear, mean to suggest this as some definitive form of the monstrous offspring. Milton's Devil is one of the greatest characters in history, but he's still a straw man set up so that Milton's dick God can triumph over him. But if Milton's Devil is the first Whig then he is also, at the end of the day, what Moldbug is fleeing from, and so serves as a

mirror through which we can look at whatever it is that's going to devour him when he reaches the center of his maze. It will not be enough to identify Moldbug's monster, but it will at least give us a sense of what it looks like.

It's important, first of all, to understand that the Devil is something Moldbug is genuinely revolted by, and this revulsion shows through in his work. Over and over again, Moldbug insists that order, law, and the concept of goodness are interchangeable synonyms, whereas chaos is inherently a force for evil and indeed the very definition of evil. Indeed, in one particularly florid passage of a minor blogpost he goes so far as to flatly proclaim that "Satan is the Lord of Chaos and the Father of Lies," which is a pretty impressive bit of vitriol from an atheist.

And in this regard it is not hard to see his objection. Consider Satan at the start of *Paradise Lost*, moments after the Fall. Milton describes Satan's position in absolute terms: "a dungeon horrible" that consists only of "sights of woe, Regions of sorrow, doleful shades, where peace And rest can never dwell, hope never comes That comes to all, but torture without end." "Such place," Milton says, "Eternal Justice has prepared For those rebellious." It is as brutal a display of formalist power as exists, and yet in its face Satan jumps up and takes charge and issues one of the most famous speeches in English literature, proclaiming that for all of God's strength, "not for those, Nor what the potent Victor in his rage Can else inflict, do I repent, or change," proclaiming that there is nothing God can do that will make him "bow and sue for grace With suppliant knee, and deify his power."

Clearly unacceptable. But in some ways more horrifying is Satan's monologue in Book Four in which he contemplates redemption, asking "Is there no place Left for repentance, none for pardon left? None left but by submission; and that word Disdain forbids me," and noting that even if he did repent, "how soon Would highth recall high thoughts, how soon unsay What feigned submission swore? Ease would recant Vows made in pain, as violent and void." In other words, Satan's defiance goes beyond any mere choice. He did not vote for revolution. Rather, he is an intrinsic and inevitable force of revolution, incapable of doing anything but defying authority. As he puts it, in the speech's most famous line, "myself am hell."

But in his complete revulsion Moldbug ends up overstating the case, and in doing so missing the actual appeal. To Moldbug Satan is indistinguishable from his figure of the wild man, fit only for life out in the forest due to his insistence on randomly killing people in the street. But for all that Milton portrays Satan as bestial, this isn't why he's one of the greatest characters in the history of literature. What's crucial about Milton's Satan is that he is

capable of masking his bestial nature in the clothing of civilization. He is monstrous, but his monstrosity is expressed in moving and beautifully written speeches. He is an effective leader - indeed second only to God within the story, bringing a full third of the angels under his command. And he is an intensely seductive, charming figure - indeed, his main action in the plot is the successful temptation of Eve. He's even positioned as a figure of science and technology, nearly turning the tide of the War in Heaven with his invention of "engines and their balls / Of missive ruin; part incentive reed / Provide, pernicious with one touch to fire."

This is still perfectly compatible with Moldbug, requiring only that we ally Satan with the Cathedral, which is of course what Johnson was doing by allying him specifically with an organized political party in the form of the Whigs. Moldbug's just getting over-excited with the wild man. But as we've seen, that over-excitement is a common error for him, and indeed for neoreactionaries in general: they repeatedly go straight for the most extreme negation available. Even the usually subtle Nick Land ends up committing the foul in the course of proclaiming Hitler to be the metaphysical absolute form of evil, asking, rhetorically, "does anybody within the (Cathedral's) globalized world still think that Adolf Hitler was less evil than the Prince of Darkness himself? Perhaps only a few scattered paleo-Christians (who stubbornly insist that Satan is really, really bad), and an even smaller number of Neo-Nazi ultras (who think Hitler was kind of cool)," going on to make an aesthetic distinction between Satan and the Antichrist, arguing that Hitler serves as the latter - "a mirror Messiah, of reversed moral polarity."

This distinction is useful, although it requires us to theorize the position that Land doesn't - of a Satanic negation as opposed to an Antichristic one. One based not in a complete reversal, but in something subtler and more ambiguous: subversion. This is the maneuver, after all, that makes Satan so compelling, especially in that first speech: he grants God's dominion and absolute power, acknowledging that he has been cast down and defeated, but then asserts his independence. In other words, he says yes before he says no. This is, notably, the exact reverse of Thacker's formulation of horror philosophy as emerging from a series of negations that eventually lead to a moment where doubt stops, although it serves much the same purpose. (Indeed, it is arguably the process of philosophical horror as experienced by the reader, who grants each of the philosopher's negations until reaching the cop-out of their acquiescence and objecting, thus reaching the awful truth the philosopher could not bear to contemplate.)

It is here that Satan becomes a real problem for Mencius Moldbug. The issue is simple: Moldbug hates the player, but he loves the game. Satan's eternal dissent repulses him, but he's head over heels for his rhetorical strategy. "Yes, but" is Moldbug's entire argumentative structure. Look at his initial moves in both the *Open Letter* and the *Gentle Introduction*. In the *Open Letter* he takes care to start from a position of sympathy with his rhetorically constructed progressive: "I am not a progressive, but I was raised as one. I live in San Francisco, I grew up as a Foreign Service brat, I went to Brown, I've been brushing my teeth with Tom's of Maine since the mid-80s." And then, in the paragraph's final sentence, the but: "what happened to me is that I lost my trust." Similarly the *Gentle Introduction*, where the move is explicitly flagged in a paragraph beginning "we'll start with a point of agreement." Yes: "As a good citizen of America, which is the greatest country on earth, one thing you believe in is separation of church and state. I too am an American, and it so happens that I too believe in separation of church and state." But: "Although one might argue that my interpretation of the formula is a little different than yours."

This isn't just the honed rhetoric of a good pitchman, not least because Moldbug's a mediocrity at it. Moldbug's addicted to the "but." It's his first choice argumentative move in almost every situation: he formulates some bit of centrist common sense. For instance (I'm reaching deeply and arbitrarily into the *Open Letter* here just to get him at his default setting - let's go with Part Seven), when he attempts to convince his rhetorical progressive that they secretly hate democracy, but that they only hate it under the name of politics, Moldbug says, "think of the associations that the words political, partisan, politician, and so on, produce in your mind. You say: George W. Bush politicized the Justice Department. And this is a brutal indictment. If you hated black people the way you hate politics, you might say George W. Bush negroized the Justice Department, and the phrase would carry the same payload of contempt. Similarly, when you hear antonyms such as apolitical, nonpartisan, bipartisan, or even the new and truly ludicrous post-partisan, your heart thrills with warmth and affection." And then, in the face of this yes, he introduces his but - a supposed anomaly given that "politics" are bad but "democracy" is good, namely that "when you hear the phrase 'apolitical democracy,' it sounds slightly off."

Now, never mind that this is a load of complete horseshit, that his "yes" is an insincere cliche of bad punditry as opposed to an attempt to formulate a thoughtful statement that a progressive might agree to, that his elision of "political" and "partisan" is sloppy and furthermore undermines his

subversion in that the phrase "nonpartisan democracy" is actually perfectly coherent, and that we accidentally caught him at his other default setting of gratuitous race-baiting. The point is stylistic. And he goes on to do things like this throughout Part Seven, just as he does throughout everything he writes, endlessly throwing up little anomalies, generally found through idiosyncratic and selective readings of primary sources, adding "but" after "but" until at last he presents, with a flourish, his blandly Antichristic negation of the initial premise and says, "so therefore this, right?"

But perhaps the bigger giveaway of Moldbug's Satanic sympathies is just the fact that he prances about calling himself a fucking Sith Lord through most of the *Gentle Introduction*. I mean, this was always Moldbug's basic problem: he wants to be an edgy rebel, and he's just not. And he ultimately even admits this, in his pitch for the red pill. The whole reason for taking it is pleasure: "it's just too much fun to see your old reality from the outside." The red pill is obviously Satanic; indeed, what other terms can Satan's rebellion be described in besides "dude took the red pill hard?" But moreover, the fun of seeing your old reality from the outside is plainly what Milton's Satan desires in proclaiming that his refusal to kneel is a victory over God. And the truth is that when Moldbug describes the "sodium-metal core, which will sear your throat like a live coal" of his red pill, well, it's hard not to think that sounds rather like chaos, not order. And that's the tragic irony: there is nobody in Moldbug's system quite so despicable as the likes of a Dissenter like Mencius Moldbug. He is, as William Blake famously said of Milton, of the Devil's party, but doesn't know it.

Now Blake, of course, was a proper Dissenter in the most gloriously freakish tradition. A literal visionary who turned his revelations into apocalyptic and revolutionary art, and who ultimately positioned himself as a sort of loving and respectful Satan to Milton himself, expanding on his worldview, both political and religious, and annexing it to the strange and bespoke mythology of eternal conflict between the coldly rational force of Urizen and the fiery and generative Los, Blake provides a sort of monstrosity that poses to Moldbug's system what Iain M. Banks called an Outside Context Problem, and described in terms of a dominant tribe on a mid-sized and fertile island watching "when suddenly this bristling lump of iron appears sailless and trailing steam in the bay and these guys carrying long funny-looking sticks come ashore and announce you've just been discovered, you're all subjects of the Emperor now, he's keen on presents called tax and these bright-eyed holy men would like a word with your priests."

Banks, however, also notes that these are the sorts of problems that civilizations "tended to encounter rather in the same way a sentence encountered a full stop," and that's a form of negation rather beyond the merely Satanic, so let's go back and zero in on one detail of our Satanic reading of Moldbug, namely the quip that Satan took the red pill. This makes, of course, two characters in our tale to have done so, the other being Nick Land. Whose "Dark Enlightenment" is, indeed, nothing more than a "yes, but" to the work of Moldbug. Could this be the reason we have been stuck circling our rhetorical prey for so long without quite getting our shot in? Could it be that the beast has already been killed, stuffed, and mounted upon the wall of another thinker? Are we about to discover, in a stunning third act twist, that the monster has been Nick Land all along?

IV.

"It sure looked like the ending. It sure looked like the goal. It sure looked beautiful, but beauty only wants control. I could've drunk the wisdom; the dignified response. But I had to go and knock the door to everything at once." - Seeming, "Holy Fire"

Of course not: we're not even halfway done. But yes, obviously that's what Land is doing. The important thing, though, is how he does the deed. "The Dark Enlightenment" is one long "yes, but" to Moldbug, but it's not written to Moldbug in any sense. Despite being important as the essay with which Land became a neoreactionary in the sense of becoming one of the fundamental thinkers of the movement - getting in, if you will - it is written as the essay in which Land becomes a neoreactionary in the sense of coming out to his previous academic audience. And it reads like one. He only gets around to bringing up these new friends he's been hanging around with a few paragraphs in, and he doesn't actually mention the boyfriend for another ten or so. And then things really get started.

But let's look at how Land gets from "hey mom, hey dad" to "meet Mencius," because it helps explain how he's using Moldbug, and thus what the "but" is. He presents Moldbug as an example of a "reactionary progressive" or of "reactionary modernism," which he positions as a coherent intellectual tradition reaching back to Thomas Hobbes that always insisted this democracy business was a bad idea. So when Moldbug is finally wheeled on stage, it's as the sort of arch-example of this turn: the libertarian who became a monarchist. And while Land clearly admires Moldbug, he blatantly presents him as a fascinating freak, a fact that becomes almost cruelly evident when he gets to "How Dawkins Got Pwned," and, discussing Moldbug quoting Dawkins quoting Huxley, says, "Moldbug seems to be holding Huxley's hand, and … (ewww!) doing that palm-stroking thing with his finger. This sure ain't vanilla-libertarian reaction anymore - it's getting seriously dark, and scary." And with this, Land's essay makes its irrevocable turn into race.

In some ways this is the heart of the Satanic inversion of Moldbug. I mean, what else was it going to be? Even the most sympathetic reading of Moldbug is going to hit "but he's a blithering racist" eventually, and an account of him that doesn't deal with that fact is going to be inadequate at best and actively disingenuous at worst. But Land, crucially, isn't offering "but racism" as a refutation of Moldbug; that's not really how Satanic inversion works, and anyway, it's a response so obvious even Moldbug explicitly anticipated it. Rather, he's offering it as the fundamentally monstrous part of Moldbug, a

fact that becomes evident in Part Four of *The Dark Enlightenment*, the last "proper" part before parts 4a through 4f, which consist mainly of Land hand-wringing extensively over race. (Moldbug hand-wrings over race a lot too, to be clear, but like most things Moldbug does, it's just better when Land does it.)

Land opens Part Four, crucially, with something very much like the point we just made at some length, discussing how "without a taste for irony, Mencius Moldbug is all but unendurable, and certainly unintelligible. Vast structures of historical irony shape his writings, at times even engulfing them. How otherwise could a proponent of traditional configurations of social order – a self-proclaimed Jacobite – compose a body of work that is stubbornly dedicated to subversion?" At this point anyone with a rudimentary understanding of how this sort of game is played is sitting up in their chairs and watching with rapt attention as Land lines up his shot.

Land continues by focusing on Moldbug's decision to label the credo of the Cathedral as "Universalism," focusing in particular on the way in which the Declaration of Independence visibly dodges the question of justifying its claim "that all men are created equal" by proclaiming it self-evident when, as Land observes, this is actually not particularly self-evident and was, at the time of writing, quite a novel idea largely unsupported by the preceding centuries of western civilization. Moreover, it's an emphatic declaration of faith. But, as Land puts it, "since the Cathedral has ascended to global supremacy, it no longer has need for Founding Fathers, who awkwardly recall its parochial ancestry, and impede its transnational public relations. Rather, it seeks perpetual re-invigoration through their denigration."

But, and now we reach the coup de grace, just as the Cathedral has to endlessly repudiate the very religious faith from which its philosophical cornerstones were carved, "so is its trend to consistently neo-fascist political economy smoothed by the concerted repudiation of a 'neo-nazi' (or paleo-fascist) threat. It is extremely convenient, when constructing ever more nakedly corporatist or 'third position' structures of state-directed pseudo-capitalism, to be able to divert attention to angry expressions of white racial paranoia, especially when these are ornamented by clumsily modified nazi insignia, horned helmets, Leni Riefenstahl aesthetics, and slogans borrowed freely from *Mein Kampf*." Now, of course, Land is several premises to the wind here, and the reaction of loudly clearing your throat and suggesting that he has in no way sufficiently unpacked the concept of the Cathedral's "trend to consistently neo-fascist political economy" to simply deploy it casually is wholly appropriate. But we're already in the position of having said "yes" to

Moldbug, so we can't really get out of the car just because it's visibly hurtling towards a cliff.

At this point Land gets around to talking about the way "Moldbug offers a sanitized white nationalist blog reading list, consisting of writers who - to varying degrees of success - avoid immediate reversion to paleo-fascist self-parody," at which point he starts using the language that gives away the game. For instance, he refers to one blog as "the ripped outer edge of Moldbug's carefully truncated spectrum," as part of "a decaying orbit, spiralling into the great black hole that is hidden at the dead center of modern political possibility," and finally as the gateway "into the crushing abyss where light dies." What's key is the contrast between this language and the description of Moldbug's "sanitized" list - the tacit accusation that Moldbug is insufficiently willing to take the plunge into white nationalism. And he eventually circles back, looking both at Moldbug's evident hesitation and stream of "I'm not a white nationalist" disclaimers and at the way in which Moldbug justifies his tentative interest in and non-rejection of the position. This is clearly the meat of it for Land - the point at which he's out-Moldbugged Moldbug to create something even more terrifying. Certainly it served to make him a popular figure among the audience of racist trolls that Moldbug was about to abandon.

But Land, revealingly, does something thoroughly unlike himself at this point and hesitates. Part of this comes from a fundamental rhetorical problem with what Land does. Like Moldbug, and to a lesser extent Yudkowsky, Land is a red pill merchant. But the red pill is a rhetorical impossibility - an emphatic endpoint to any line of thought. The two actual red pills we've identified in our explorations so far - Satan's fall and Nick Land's going mad - are notable for being relative full stops in the course of their intellectual trajectories. Both Satan and Land go on for some length after taking the red pill, it's true, but the main event's clearly come and gone. So much as Land plays the "crushing abyss where light dies" card, let's be honest, the "John Derbyshire makes some good points" card he plays almost immediately after is one deserving of a long, loud chorus of "laaaaaaaaame."

And Land clearly knows it. He's withering in his assessment of his first blatantly racist writer, describing the "pitifully constricted, stereotypical circuit" of his writing. Or there's his description of the rest of the neoreactionary movement: "start digging into the actually existing 'reactosphere', and things get quite astoundingly ugly very quickly." Or even his grim assessment that "if reaction ever became a popular movement, its few slender threads of bourgeois (or perhaps dreamily 'aristocratic') civility wouldn't hold back the beast for long." Sure, Land, apocalypse-fetishist that he

is, doesn't actually care all that much if the racist beast gets let off his chain, but he alternates between cringing at his new friends and flopping with relief at how glad he is to be in China, away from this madness. Which begs the question of what the hell he's doing courting these morons.

The answer, broadly speaking, is that he imagines there's something useful to be found in this sewer. He is the materialist of the trio, after all. As he puts it, "when a sane, pragmatic, and fact-based negotiation of human differences is forbidden by ideological fiat, the alternative is not a reign of perpetual peace, but a festering of increasingly self-conscious and militantly defiant thoughtcrime, nourished by publicly unavowable realities, and energized by powerful, atavistic, and palpably dissident mythologies." Which isn't actually the single stupidest thing ever said, although one gets the sense that perhaps Land's definition of "sane, pragmatic, and fact-based negotiation of human differences" is not particularly any of these things. But the sense that perhaps we could do a better job of talking about race is not exactly a proposition restricted to the right. Indeed, one rather suspects white progressives are about the only people happy with the current "we solved racism in the 1960s so let's stop talking about it" consensus.

But what Land is angling for is not actually this fabled "sensible conversation about race," and the idea that it might exist in some hypothetical alternate space isn't terribly important to what he's doing except inasmuch as it provides some vague hope that what he's trying to do isn't based entirely on deranged morons. He is, after all, still firmly in the monster business, and monsters are rarely described as "sane, pragmatic, and fact-based." Indeed, Land's real problem here is that the noxious idiocy of white nationalists is actually his favorite thing about them, just because it's so utterly horrifying to the liberal consensus. But it's worth, as a result, flipping to the end and looking at how he ends the whole sprawling bit of madness.

Part 4f of "The Dark Enlightenment" is entitled "Approaching the Bionic Horizon," which is to say, that nice techno-capitalist Singularity that Land has been trying to approach all career. In this case he defines the term as "the threshold of conclusive nature-culture fusion at which a population becomes indistinguishable from its technology." And, in a move that vividly highlights just how far afield from his newly acquired crowd of racist moron fans he actually is, he immediately analogizes it to the work of Octavia Butler, the renowned black feminist science fiction writer, and specifically her *Xenogenesis* trilogy, which is largely about interbreeding between humans and a tentacle-covered trisexual race called the Oankali. To paraphrase Land as he describes

Moldbug's infatuation with Huxley's racism, this sure ain't vanilla-white nationalist racism anymore.

From here he jumps to biologist John H. Campbell, who he calls "a prophet of monstrosity" and quotes at length describing the way in which evolution itself evolves over time, suggesting a new sort of eugenics based around high-end ultra-expensive genetic engineering on the part of the rich and powerful who, with this staggering technology at their disposal, would only become more so, essentially seceding from humanity to form a new successor species. As Land puts it, "for racial nationalists, concerned that their grandchildren should look like them, Campbell is the abyss. Miscegenation doesn't get close to the issue. *Think face tentacles.*" (Emphasis his.) From this perspective, he suggests, in the essay's closing two sentences, "whatever emerges from the dialectics of racial terror remains trapped in trivialities. It's time to move on."

It's a deliciously mocking, cheeky conclusion - the use of "move on" evokes, of course, a sense of traditional progressive history - indeed, it's the name of an American leftist PAC, a use one doubts Land was unaware of when he picked it as the closing line of his epic. So Land's trolling on a large scale here, positing his bio-technological supplanting of the human race (held tediously but pointlessly back by the Cathedral) as a sort of ultimate culmination and horror reading of both reactionary and progressive thought. And it's true, the consolidation of genetic technology among the rich and powerful is indeed a plausible nightmare for humanity. But that still doesn't make it terribly appealing. If nothing else, it just doesn't feel like a path through John Derbyshire and the "human biodiversity" crowd is the best available way to approach our end. Let us assume that we are fucked, sure. Perhaps even let us assume that the way out is, as Land insists it must be, some form of secession in which a limited pool of humanity bails out in some form. But must the abyss be so boring?

The problem is, it's hard to get a "but" in on Land. Unlike Moldbug and Yudkowsky, he's actually legitimately good at this whole philosophy thing. He's well aware of the tradition of horror readings and monstrosity in philosophy, and knows how to wall off the most obvious in-roads. Chipping away at the edges of his racialism isn't irrelevant, but the truth is that it's mostly pretty easy to patch his argument around the racist idiots and just get to the bionic horizon via other means, and he knows it.

So you'll excuse me if I pause for a moment and take on conceptual reinforcements before throwing myself into this task. To wit, China Miéville, the Marxist thinker and, as Land describes him (see, I didn't cheat) in "Abstract

Horror," "sinister-punk writer," has theorized monstrosity at admirable length. Land, for his part, complains that Miéville's "horror projects typically fail the test of abstraction," which on the one hand can generally be laughingly dismissed on the grounds that Miéville, as a Marxist materialist, can hardly be said to have failed at something he clearly never attempted, and on the other hand is more or less the entire point of this current excursion.

Miéville writes at length on the distinction between two modes of horror: the hauntological and the Weird. The former, epitomized by the figure of the ghost (which Miéville adamantly separates from the monster as a category), is linked to the Gothic tradition. The threat is dead, buried, or repressed, and calls into question the integrity of the present, revealing it to be eaten or succumbing to the awful inescapability of the past. The Weird, on the other hand, is not old so much as *ancient* - not buried but lost, forgotten, or, ideally, never really knowable in the first place. Its true nature, however, is outsideness. Hauntology comes from within us; the Weird from outside.

Moldbug, for instance, is clearly hauntological. It's baked into his basic premise: the losing side of the English Civil War is back, and it thinks this silly little democracy experiment has really gone on long enough. A spectre is haunting Europe and all. Roko's Basilisk, on the other hand, is firmly Weird - a cruel and inhuman intelligence from the future that reaches back towards us. But which is Land? For the most part he seems firmly in the camp of the Weird. Certainly that's the swipe he's taking at Miéville when he suggests that his horrors are insufficiently abstract: he's of the ghosts' party and doesn't know it. And it's where he's going with his genetically engineered face tentacles, or the looming but inexpressible horror of *Phyl-Undhu*, a world described as "already winter, and the darkness was slow to ebb. Through the unveiled kitchen window they could see across the street, which was patchily illuminated by sparse suburban street lighting, cold bluish neon feeding shadows. A random speckling of warmer night lights dotted the houses opposite. Roofs were dusted with early snow, catching the luminosity of Earth's dead satellite, which hung, huge and low, in a purple-black sky."

And yet let's look at a couple of phrases as Land describes his beloved army of Crackers. "America's racial 'original sin' was foundational." "As liberal decency has severed itself from intellectual integrity, and exiled harsh truths, these truths have found new allies, and become considerably harsher." And, of course, his description of the "festering" and "atavistic" nature of repressed white nationalism. That's hauntological through and through. Which isn't exactly a surprise if one thinks about white nationalism. But it's still puzzling to see Land, arch-theorist of the Weird, only able to muster some stupid

hauntological racists for his big rhetorical turning point. What's going on, and what does it have to do with Land's swipe at Miéville's lack of abstraction, aside from being a case of the pot calling the kettle black?

The thing is, Miéville's more than aware of the way these two can blur. He describes the two categories as a "non-dialectic opposition, contrary iterations of a single problematic." Indeed, he points out that synthesizing the two is perfectly straightforward, positing a creature he calls the Skulltopus, which combines the hauntological skull with tentacles, but, as he suggests, "there is something not right about it - the two components may imply one another but are resistant to syncrex." Instead he suggests that this is something of a proper opposition "in a manner suggestive of quantum superposition."

But what's key is that either one will generally do. "The traces of the Weird," Miéville says, "are inevitably sensible in a hauntological work, and vice versa." The horror can emerge from within or penetrate from without, but the end result is basically the same. And the tension is one Miéville plays with constantly in his fiction, a tendency perhaps perfectly summed up by the fact that he follows his dismissal of the functionality of the Skulltopus by enthusiastically drawing one, and appends an earlier draft to the end of the essay. Flitting between the two positions is Miéville's modus operandi. And it's something that Land, with his overt preference for the Weird, captured effectively in his declaration that "unknown unknowns cosmically predominate," can legitimately be accused of missing, especially when he slips thoughtlessly into the hauntological. Finally, a chink we can shove a giant fucking sword through. Or, better yet, a hypodermic needle. So let's drug Nick Land up with some red pill, hijack his entire philosophical edifice, and plunge it into an abyss that, while possibly no less terrifying than his, is at least funnier and less full of lame racists. To quote a different Keanu Reeves film, party on dudes.

Clearly we're going to have to understand red pills then. Thankfully we have quite a lot of good resources for that in the ground we've already covered; enough so that we're almost spoiled for choice. But let's start with Moldbug, if only to get it out of the way. Specifically, "How Dawkins Got Pwned," which begins with a typically discursive analysis of the basic concept of pwnage, which Moldbug defines, per Wikipedia, as "to take unauthorized control of someone else or something belonging to someone else by exploiting a vulnerability." Hey, that's handy.

Moldbug unpacks this in terms of Dawkins' own famed biological metaphor for ideas as "memes," focusing on the idea of a parasitic memeplex, which is to say, a hostile and destructive cluster of ideas. Being Moldbug, he

approaches this in preposterously manichean terms, proclaiming that "when we see two populations of memes in conflict, we know both cannot be healthy, because a healthy meme is true by definition and the truth cannot conflict with itself." Which, hahaha no. I mean, you don't even need to plunge into postmodern notions of multiple and variant truths to recognize that, when we're working in any sort of immunology, biological or memetic, the notion of "healthy" and "unhealthy" is not a straightforward binary nor a situation where something is reliably one or the other. Readers interested in theorizing this in detail might try introducing words like "chemotherapy" into the discussion.

But to this end, Moldbug contemplates the idea of a "generic parasitic memeplex" and how one might come up with a generalized immune response to it. The goal here is, as Moldbug puts it, "a formula for total world domination," which is to say, spoilers, he's just looking to reverse engineer the Cathedral according to a more or less arbitrarily imported heuristic of contagion, morbidity, and persistence. This results in most of the mistakes you'd expect, which is to say that he identifies seemingly random parts of the Protestant tradition and then comes up with reasons why they're especially clever and vicious adaptations suitable for maximum pwnage. The high point of this is when he decides that asceticism offers "a clear adaptive advantage" because the only people who can be ascetics are the rich and powerful, so it serves as a status marker. (Yes, you read that right - Moldbug suggests that asceticism is a fast track to popularity.)

But there's a larger problem, which is that Moldbug is, broadly speaking, using the engineering technology of the red pill to try to build the Cathedral. Pwnage is clearly a red pill sort of concept. Indeed, they're both firmly from the same technophilic cyberpunk aesthetic that is, at the end of the day, the fundamental connection among Moldbug, Yudkowsky, and Land. And that aesthetic is very much based around a sort of individual targeting. The word we're circling around, obviously, is "hacking," and as oversignified as the word is, it's not actually a bad image for what we're talking about. The red pill, pwnage, and for that matter the horror reading, monstrous offspring, and Satanic inversions all follow the same basic pattern - a sort of conceptual infiltration of someone's thought in which their own methods and systems are used against them. Done as a philosophical move - whether on the conceptual level of Deleuze's monstrous offspring or Thacker's horror reading or the individual level of Dawkins' supposed pwnage or Land's genuine break - it requires the creation of a rhetorical construct to engage in dialogue with the

target. The hacker is as fine a model as Satan for this, as is the virologist imagined by Moldbug in his "generic parasitic memeplex" engineering.

The problem is simple: this cannot possibly be how the Cathedral works. It's not spread by this sort of intimate seduction. And this is evident in the sort of ridiculous parameters Moldbug is setting out for it. Contagion, for instance, takes place, in Moldbug's mind, both through parental and educational transmission (which is to say as an ideology drummed into people from birth in the same way that "God chose the King so you cannot question him" was) and through social transmission, which he defines as "informal transmission among adults, following existing social networks," which, if you guessed that his example of how not to do that would be "Nazis," good work. So he proclaims that "our parasite should be *intellectually fashionable*. All the cool people in town should want to get infected." This is stupid in ways so fundamental that it is almost easy to miss amidst the idiosyncratic detail of Moldbug's approach: why the fuck would the Cathedral still want to be transmitting among adults according to notions of coolness, which is after all pretty fundamentally opposed to the notion of educational transmission. The phrase is not "just as cool as school." What Moldbug clearly wants in engineering the Cathedral is for social transmission to be a matter of persistence, but because he's approaching it from a model of pwnage he ends up fundamentally building it wrong. Or, to put it another way, what happens to Dawkins isn't pwnage. And while it is still worth understanding, this isn't quite the context we care about doing it in.

Instead, let's pick at this idea of pwnage through conversation - what we might describe as textual hacking. Framed in those terms two important examples present themselves. The first is Eliezer Yudkowsky, for whom it's something of a regular concern. The error he flees from is very much a textual one - the idea of an argument that is compelling but irrational. The entire point of his pseudo-Bayesian style is that it is supposedly resistant to pwnage. But Yudkowsky's most explicit and intriguing engagement with the phenomenon comes in the form of the AI-Box Experiment. Like Roko's Basilisk, this is an element of Yudkowsky's thought that is notable for attracting more attention from people who aren't Yudkowsky than it did from him. Unlike the Basilisk, however, it is not a problem for Yudkowsky's thought, but an actually kind of cool idea. Indeed, it's one of the reasons why intelligent people with real achievements have taken Yudkowsky seriously.

Like any self-respecting bit of Yudkowsky, it exists to solve a deeply idiosyncratic problem. Specifically, it addresses a theoretical argument about whether a particular type of AI research that's not actually possible right now

is safe. The problem is simple enough: obviously we want to build a superintelligent AI to run the world. But that could be dangerous - what if it's an unfriendly AI that wants to take over the world like in *The Matrix* or *Terminator 3* or something? So we build the AI in a secure and isolated computer that can't start taking over random systems or anything - a box, if you will. The question is this: is that safe? Yudkowsky argues that it is not, because a superintelligent AI would be able to talk its way out of the box. Or, to offer the hypothesis in his precise formulation, "'"I think a transhuman can take over a human mind through a text-only terminal." And he proposes the AI Box experiment as a means of demonstrating that this is true. In it, two people make a monetary bet and then roleplay out a dialogue between a boxed AI and a person given the authority to decide whether to let it out or not in which the AI tries to talk its way out of the box. And it is important to stress that it is roleplayed: valid exchanges include things like "give me a cure for cancer and I'll let you out." "OK here." "You are now free."

Depending on your perspective, Yudkowsky either completely misunderstands why this is interesting or understands it too well for his own good. The answer is not, obviously, because this is a pressing issue that requires settling. Rather, it is because it's the setup of a really good science fiction story, and indeed of several classics. What is interesting is less the rules than the content of the debate itself - how the AI presents its case and what strategies it uses to try to talk its way out, and what the human does and doesn't consider valid evidence of the AI's good nature. Much more interesting than "who will win and what does that say about AI research" is the simple drama of it - one imagines any actual rendition of the experiment would be fascinating to read. Yudkowsky, however, treated this as an actively useful game that helped demonstrate the correctness of his views. Indeed, he played the game five times under officially codified rules, winning twice against people from within his community, then winning one out of three times against people who he suspected were not actually convinced his proposition was wrong but were "just curious" and willing to offer thousands of dollars as stakes before quitting the game because, as he put it, "I didn't like the person I turned into when I started to lose."

Like I said, it's the sort of thing you really want to read the transcripts of; especially of the three he won. So it's fascinating that Yudkowsky has refused to release said transcripts, saying that people "learn to respect the unknown unknowns." Which is to say that he thinks what's most important about the game is what it reveals for strategies in AI research, as opposed to what it

reveals about people. The result is something that mostly just reveals things about Eliezer Yudkowsky like "he's crap at recognizing his own best ideas."

But for all of that, it's clear that Yudkowsky has a healthy respect for the idea that it's possible to pwn a human consciousness through words alone, and a regard for the artistry and beauty involved in the attempt. Indeed, Yudkowsky has credited the idea (contrary to those who suggested he nicked it from *Terminator 3*) to the scene in *Silence of the Lambs* in which Hannibal Lecter convinces a fellow inmate to commit suicide simply by talking to him from another cell - a magnificent instance of textual hacking, albeit one that, having been previously unmentioned, cannot serve as our second example. Although now that we've brought it up…

It's not that *Silence of the Lambs* itself is particularly interesting or relevant. It's actually the only part of Thomas Harris's cycle of novels to be absent from Bryan Fuller's television adaptation, which is a murder-drenched dramatization of the entire literary style we've demonstrated thus far and the bit of plumage we're currently diving off the path towards. Its basic unit of interaction is the psychoanalytic dialogue; an exchange that never quite settles straightforwardly into a pattern of interrogation or debate or mutual exploration or parallel monologue, but instead twists and winds through all four. Consider this snippet, which interpolates a famous monologue from *Red Dragon*:

> Hannibal: Killing must feel good to God, too. He does it all the time, and are we not created in his image?
> Will Graham: Depends on who you ask.
> Hannibal: God's terrific. He dropped a church roof on 34 of his worshipers last Wednesday night in Texas, while they sang a hymn.
> Will: Did God feel good about that?
> Hannibal: He felt powerful.

This exchange is most obviously interesting in how it navigates a relationship between abstract and material authority. God is simultaneously cast as a genuinely sovereign authority - a Platonic Form that man merely echoes - and as a brutal dictator capriciously executing people to assert his power. It comes wickedly close to satirizing and deconstructing the whole of Moldbug, and undoubtedly does so to Milton's God. The show does this often, worrying the bone of authority and creation, refracting it over and over again through its Chesapeake Gothic hall of mirrors. Consider, for instance,

this revisitation of the exchange two seasons later, this time between Will and an imagined interlocutor:

> Abigail Hobbs: Do you believe in God?
> Will: What I believe is closer to science fiction than anything in the Bible.
> Abigail: We all know it, but nobody ever says that G-dash-d won't do a G-dash-d-damn thing to answer anybody's prayers.
> Will: God can't save any of us because it's... inelegant. Elegance is more important than suffering. That's his design.
> Abigail: Are you talking about God or Hannibal?
> Will: Hannibal's not God. He wouldn't have any fun being God. Defying God, that's his idea of a good time. There's nothing he'd love more than to see this roof collapse mid-Mass, choirs singing... he would just love it, and he thinks God would love it, too.

In the first exchange authority and power are at loggerheads; God's authority as creator seems necessarily legitimate, and yet he kills to feel powerful. Notably, he does not even kill for power, but rather for the feeling of power, this being strangely decoupled from its actual exertion. The second exchange, however, removes power from the equation. The suffering that exists is not there to make God feel good, but is an irrelevant byproduct of an elegant design. The use of "design" is, within *Hannibal*, a catchphrase; Will utters it at the climactic moments of his psychological murder reconstructions, marking the moment when he has achieved understanding of the mind whose creation he observes. Notably, this means that Will is profiling God here, a fact that complicates any effort to read this exchange as a redemptive revision of the earlier one.

But the word "design" resonates in other ways for our purposes, implying creation and engineering. If the first exchange seemed to satirize Moldbug, this one seems even more so. It is, after all, the great one-liner critique of Mencius Moldbug: he's exactly what you'd expect to happen if you asked a software engineer to redesign political philosophy. And crucially, Moldbug basically agrees with it - he just also genuinely believes that the Silicon Valley "disruptor" crowd would be capable of running the world with no problems if only people would let them. Which in turn sheds light on the other part of the second exchange, Will's subsequent assessment of Hannibal's desire to defy God. Obviously this casts Hannibal in the role of Milton's Satan, and we'll pull that thread in a moment, but consider first the suggestion that God would

enjoy Hannibal's defiance. This is an accusation of perversity, of course, and one Moldbug at least would furiously reject.

But the perversion is clearly there, in every flaring of edgelord rebelliousness Moldbug musters. It's what's at the heart of his jovially taunting prose style - the genial condescension with which he addresses his imagined progressive reader. It's at the heart of the Silicon Valley genius CEO mystique, implicit in the word "disrupt" that Moldbug's ilk wear with such pride. It's the perversion that's always been at the heart of Milton's God. Of course he enjoys Satan's defiance.

Hannibal, however, poses a larger problem than Satan by dint of being a cannibalistic serial killer. It is not that this necessarily puts him in a significantly worse ethical bracket. Moldbug would obviously get very self-righteous about the violence involved, because he always does, but Hannibal's clearly got his number at this point, so who cares? Indeed, *Hannibal* reflects extensively on the issue, as in this trialogue:

> Hannibal: First and worst sign of sociopathic behavior, cruelty to animals.
> Jack Crawford : That doesn't apply in the kitchen.
> Hannibal: I have no taste for animal cruelty. That's why I employ an ethical butcher.
> Bella Crawford: An ethical butcher, be kind to animals and eat them?
> Hannibal: I'm afraid I insist on it, no need for unnecessary suffering. Human emotions are a gift from our animal ancestors. Cruelty is a gift humanity has given itself.
> Jack: A gift that keeps on giving.

What this is is an invocation of Gnon. Land justifies Gnon's creation in terms of how it "permits a consensual acceptance of Natural Law, unobstructed by theological controversy." Natural Law, of course, is just as much a philosophical gambit as God, and so this does not actually clarify anything, but that's never been the point of Gnon. The point of Gnon is that he is a god of harsh realities and uncomfortable truths - a Skulltopus sort of God fusing the repression of the hauntological with the indifference of the Weird. Among Gnon's creeds, more or less explicitly, is that violence will reassert itself, as will all the other brutal forms of disagreement that Universalism's pseudo-tolerance obscures.

Gnon is a constant factor in *Hannibal*, embodied by the carnal reality of Hannibal's murders, which are always counterpointed by the show's lushly trypophobic food design, emphasizing both Hannibal's refinement and the

way in which his murders are a product of animalistic Natural Law - a simple consequence of the fact that he's a predator. And this is even explicitly juxtaposed with pragmatic law, as in this exchange between Hannibal and his psychiatrist.

> Hannibal: Almost anything can be trained to resist its instinct.
> Bedelia Du Maurier: A shepherd dog doesn't savage the sheep.
> Hannibal: But it wants to.

But Gnon is counterbalanced by the basic camp of the entire endeavor. This is, after all, a television adaptation of Thomas Harris's gloriously lurid sex crime thrillers, although Fuller in some ways anchors his baroque psycho-philosophical meanderings by removing or de-emphasizing the sexual content of the crimes. But Mads Mikkelsen's Hannibal is still an over-the-top figure, from his outsized tastes and appetites to the deliciously bestial snarl that he contorts his face into when the mask of Hannibal's "person suit" slips or the beast is wounded. At times he appears in Will's extravagantly experimental hallucinations as a black stag with an impassively expressionless human face and vast antlers, the Wendigo. It's ridiculous.

And unlike the lingering threat of violence, camp has been in unfortunately short supply so far in this voyage. There are flashes of it in Land, including in "The Cult of Gnon," which ends with a parenthetical "I need to take a quick break in order to sacrifice this goat … feel free to carry on chanting without me." In particular, you can almost-fairly describe Nick Land's version of Moldbug as camp. But camp is largely absent from Moldbug and Yudkowsky, and it's a decided flaw in both of them - a significant part of why both are so easy for Land to parody.

And within *Hannibal*, camp is inextricable from the weird power Hannibal seems to wield. The show maintains an almost Todorovian ambiguity over whether Hannibal is in fact a supernatural entity or not, except depicted almost entirely in negative space. Nobody speculates out loud over whether Hannibal is an ordinary human or not. No mythological origin for him is ever even hinted at. And yet he is visibly inhuman - a monstrous something-else that is faster, deadlier, more charming and more clever, certainly more refined and elegant, than a man could hope to be. It is there in the unspoken alternative in Will and Abigail's discourse on God - that Hannibal is demonic. Indeed it is central to Hannibal's ethics of eating; he rejects the label of "cannibal" because, as he explains to one of his victims, "it's only cannibalism

if we're equals." And by virtue of his successful hunting of them, they are necessarily not equals.

This reflects a key concept of Moldbug - one established in the very first post on *Unqualified Reservations*, when he proposes a simple plan of action, which he calls formalism: "let's figure out exactly who has what, now, and give them a little fancy certificate. Let's not get into who should have what." And from this assign absolute sovereignty to those with power, a simple reification of the pragmatic reality of things. It's shockingly materialist for Moldbug, although obviously the particulars of "figure out exactly who has what, now, and give them a little fancy certificate" are a fairly stark horizon for that line of thought. Still, for Moldbug power self-justifies - his one concession to Gnon, deep and fundamental enough to suffice.

But there is another key concept that Hannibal embodies here, albeit one that is not quite in Moldbug. One of Moldbug's most fundamental debts is to the Scottish philosopher Thomas Carlyle. His essay "Why Carlyle matters" opens by proclaiming him the "one writer in English whose name can be uttered with Shakespeare's," which is of course a standard gambit when you're upselling a second-rate stylist. Moldbug unpacks a bunch of key concepts in Carlyle - his misanthropic view of history, for instance, and his notion of slavery, which is the occasion for Moldbug's infamous declaration that "the innate character and intelligence of some is more suited to mastery than slavery. For others, it is more suited to slavery," and further that 17th century Spaniards "found that Africans tended to make good slaves," a fact that "is most parsimoniously explained by genetic differences," from which he transitions into talking about how a good slave is "loyal, patient, and not exceptionally bright." Another Carlyle essay - "From Mises to Carlyle: my sick journey to the dark side of the force" - uses Carlyle to lay out his manichean order/chaos dualism in its starkest and most direct terms. "To a Carlylean," he says, having identified himself as one, "the main event is the struggle between left and right. Which is the struggle between good and evil. Which is the struggle between order and chaos. Evil is chaos; good is order. Evil is left; good is right. Evil is fiction; good is truth. Gentlemen, there is no other road! The facts, it's true, are stones between our teeth. Shall we chew these stones? If not now, when?"

And yet puzzlingly, the idea for which Thomas Carlyle is best-known is almost entirely absent from Moldbug's work. Carlyle is most associated with the great man theory of history - a view that Kleio's tale is shaped primarily by heroes, who, in Carlyle's worldview, become almost superhuman figures, taking hold of the world and steering it with the aid of divine inspiration. Moldbug

dances around this, and not just because of the theism, but it's clearly there, tacitly underpinning his mythologizing of the sovereign. Indeed, one of his few explicit acknowledgments of this aspect of Carlyle comes in a post where he offers a lengthy excerpt from *Heroes and Hero-Worship* to commemorate the death of Steve Jobs, who, recall, he'd pitched as his top choice for king. And he concludes the *Gentle Introduction* with a stirring speech that actually culminates in an invocation of Kleio, but that begins, "above all, then, the Reaction depends on one question. Will good people undertake it? No - will *great* people undertake it? If so, it will happen, and I think succeed. The most important thing about this entire project: at every step, in every thing it does, it must attract the *best*." So for despite his silence on the matter, it is clear that the Great Man is as central to Moldbug as Marx is.

This actually sets up an intriguing bit of tension between Moldbug and Land, who in recent months has taken to advocating for a schism between neoreaction (his preferred faction) and what he calls Heroic Reaction, a political variation of it that seeks a commander-leader, and that he tacitly accuses the bulk of the alt-right of pursuing. Highlighting the perversity, Land proclaims "Moldbug is over-rated" to be Heroic Reaction's first tenet. But while Land rejects the lure of the Heroic, both Moldbug and Yudkowsky are seduced.

But let's be clear about how Hannibal embodies this concept, because it might not be the most obvious way. The temptation is of course to declare him a parodic inversion of the Great Man - the Villain of history. This is not a notion that arises in Carlyle, however. And while one can regard this as an oversight, the alternative explanation is also compelling: there is no such thing as a Villain of history. Hannibal is in fact the Great Man himself. This fits; the European aristocrat is part and parcel of who Hannibal is, which is why his two best incarnations were played by non-Americans. Harris dapples his origin with the same terrors of the twentieth century that Moldbug loves to pick over in showing how America is a communist country. And indeed with a moment's thought this becomes obvious: for all Carlyle might rail against democracy, he'd be a fool if he tried to deny that the Whigs had shaped history. Indeed, in what must surely be one of the most biting moments of Carlyle for Moldbug, he even treats Cromwell as an example of the Hero as King in *Heroes and Hero-Worship*. And as Moldbug points out, the Devil was the first Whig. Of course he's a Great Man.

Is this our solution, then? Embrace the Defier, Hannibal Lecter as Kleio's Champion, the Great Hero of History, and ride out into glorious battle with the end of days? It's tempting. Certainly neither Yudkowsky nor Moldbug

offer anything that would stand up to Hannibalism. Land is a trickier business - his insistence that "pleasure is not an end, but a tool" in the course of his rejection of utilitarian ethics is an effective weapon against the "no ethics, only aesthetics" stylings that make Hannibal so compelling. Equally, on strictly Gnon-level concerns, you would kind of favor the experienced serial killer over the speed-addict philosopher. Alas, this is also the bridge too far; cannibalistic murders ultimately don't pass the philosophical sniff test. And in any case, the whole being fictional thing introduces complications outside the scope of this work.

V.

"I am not man so much as syndrome; as a voice that bellows in the human heart. I am a rain. I cannot be contained. Free of Life, how then shall I be shackled? Free of Time, how then shall History be my cage? I am a wave, an influence. Who then shall be made safe from me?" - Alan Moore*, From Hell*

That's not to say that fiction doesn't have utility to us. As I said, the textual hacking phenomenon acquits itself well in fiction, and the psychoanalytic jousting of *Hannibal* is not the only example of it we've seen so far. Indeed, it's probably fairest to classify the AI-Box Experiment as fictional, since it fits neatly into a classic science fiction tradition of such tales. (Consider Alex Garland's 2015 film *Ex Machina* in particular, as it's basically a dramatization of Yudkowsky's experiment.) And in fact the second example of textual hacking to have been mapped so far in our little eschatological excursion is also fictional: the temptation of Eve in *Paradise Lost*.

Unlike the AI-Box Experiment, the transcript of this one exists, but even before we get to it there are some very important conclusions to draw. First of all, this provides a significant new word to describe textual hacking, namely "temptation." And indeed, given the specific story of Adam and Eve, "seduction" is appropriate. This is the sort of game for which sex is a metaphor. Second of all, and perhaps most astonishingly, we're twenty-five thousand words or so into this book and we still haven't had a woman in it who isn't fictional. Third of all, if we're looking for examples of "temptation" and "seduction" it says something that we couldn't actually find any within neoreaction itself.

But actually, if we want to read the temptation of Eve as a version of the AI-Box Experiment one of the first things we notice is that it's a near-perfect model for how one imagines a neoreactionary would play. Which is to say, Satan opens by negging Eve, accusing her of looking at him "with disdain, Displeas'd that I approach the thus, and gaze Insatiate, I thus single, nor have feard Thy awful brow," which may be the earliest instance of telling someone they have bitchy resting face. Unfortunately this attitude is not accidental, with *Paradise Lost* making the unequivocal claim that the fall of man was because bitches ain't shit. But while Milton is pretty clear that Eve fucks up because she's a woman, that doesn't mean he has her go down in such a substanceless way. He ultimately persuades Eve via "perswasive words, impregn'd With Reason, to her seeming, and with Truth." And his argument is made over the course of about fifty lines, and is theologically sophisticated, suggesting that

even though eating the fruit would represent a defiance of God, He would ultimately praise Eve's "dauntless vertue, whom the pain Of Death denounc't, whatever thing Death be, Deterrd not from achieving what might leade To happier life, knowledge of Good and Evil."

Ultimately, Satan's argument hinges on the vast power that Knowledge offers. On the one hand, this is another depressing bit of sexism, as it's presented as appealing to Eve's womanly vanity. But on the other it speaks to the parallelism that's at the heart of *Paradise Lost*'s larger project. The temptation of Eve is of course one half of the Fall of Man, which is itself parallel to Satan's Fall, which is, depending on how you count, either three or four iterations of the same basic event - a textual pwnage, as it were. But two of these iterations - Adam's decision to eat the fruit of Knowledge and Satan's Fall - have an interesting characteristic relevant to our larger project, which is that they are not presented as dialogues. And since we are dealing with puppets of Moldbug, Yudkowsky, and Land (along with supporting players) as opposed to engaged in some sort of debate with the men themselves (ew), this is the specific sort of textual hacking we most care about. Whatever intellectual position Satan represents, this notion of power is how Milton pwns it.

You can probably see where this is going. "Whatever intellectual position Satan represents" is not an unknown quantity. We answered that one already: he's a parody of reaction, neo or otherwise, and a figure with deep-rooted similarities to both Moldbug and Land. But let's be precise about what Milton's pwnage here really means, because it's also Milton's pwnage in the same sense that Moldbug talks about Dawkins' pwnage. The "of the devil's party" quip cuts both ways; Milton fatally undermines his own liberal ideology at the same time that he pwns Moldbug's. But whoever the target is, it's indisputable who's doing the pwning: the Cathedral.

Which brings us back to our long-postponed question of what actually happened to Dawkins. The answer, as we noted, is clearly not that he got pwned in any targeted sense. But remember, Moldbug's basic point about him - that he's a Christian atheist - is absolutely correct. Even Dawkins, who is, let's be clear, actually worse than Moldbug at this whole "philosophy" thing, recognizes that he's a Christian atheist. So Moldbug's basic question - how do you set up a memeplex that is so well-entrenched that even someone who is inclined to adopt unpopular and heretical labels like "atheist" and write books with obviously trolling titles like *The God Delusion* doesn't question its basic tenets?

For all that he uselessly conflates that with the question of pwnage, Moldbug actually comes up with some correct answers here. He correctly identifies, for instance, the importance of parental and educational transmission in this sort of thing. But as noted, he confuses transmission with persistence. And when he gets to persistence he largely misses the point, talking about things like euphoria, anesthesia, and ovinization. But eventually, improbably, he circles back around to something useful, namely the idea of counterimmunity, suggesting the establishment of a "neutered false opposition" whereby a sort of official heresy is introduced as a bogeyman. It's almost right, but he's missing the forest for the trees. The use of the false opposition isn't, as he suggests, so that "heretical memes are contained… where we can see them - under control." It's to render real opposition unthinkable. The point isn't to put heretical memes where we can see them - it's to make them invisible.

But the overall point is that the Cathedral works through fundamental premises and deep social structures. It is what is taught so early and reinforced so constantly that it's hard to even notice it. It's made up of the sorts of things that one doesn't even state as premises because they're too obvious. The more inescapably basic the better. Moldbug does well to spot "democracy is a good idea" as one that doesn't come up very often when people discuss this, but it and "racism is bad" are the only two he's able to find, and he seemingly just assumes that if one's wrong the other one must be too. (It's unclear which one comes first.)

Milton, however, finds a stunner. The key moment comes in Satan's argument to Eve, when he argues that by the power offered by Knowledge "ye shall be as Gods, Knowing both Good and Evil as they know," and asks "what are Gods that Man may not become?" Crucially, this is framed in terms of Good - Satan argues that knowledge of Good and Evil will make doing Good easier, and that this knowledge is how God's goodness is attained, such that defiance of God is actually a means of drawing closer to him. It's obviously a flawed argument - that's Milton's point after all. But it's got a compelling move at its heart, which is the way in which it uses the desire for holiness to create sin.

This basic device is one identified by Stanley Fish, more or less the greatest Milton scholar of the 20th century and also more or less a poster child for everything Moldbug hates, in that he's a progressive career academic climber who, over the course of his career, went from Milton scholar to university administrator to holding down a sinecure position at Florida International University's law school nominally teaching constitutional law despite having no

training whatsoever to this effect, and a postmodernist to boot. But for all of that (and I should confess, I studied under Fish for a semester, and also fiddled the margins and kerning to make the page length on my final paper) his early career work on Milton, a book called *Surprised by Sin,* is one of the most startlingly precise and clever close-readings ever penned. (And he was always a stickler for precision in interpretation; he'd cajole the class that "you've got to read *hard*" over and over again, leading us through almost word-by-word interpretations of passages and shooting down answer after answer until someone caught the specific nuance he was trying to discuss; the experience was not unlike trying to satisfy the text parser of an old adventure game.)

Fish's argument is that Milton's prose uses this basic structure over and over again, leading the reader down a train of thought and then, as the title suggests, surprising them by having that line of thought turn sinful, thus enacting their own Fall over and over again in the book on a sentence-to-sentence level. And in his later work he refined the reading, arguing that Milton's work is in fact situated against poetic beauty itself, shunning the very idea of art's power as a horrifying rejection of God's absolute and divine truth. But the real endpoint of this - and a point that's implicit in Fish's larger work - is that Milton makes sin emerge from the basic properties of language. Metaphor and poetic technique, by appealing to ambiguity and imprecision, are fundamental affronts to the pure and absolute truth of God, and Milton's work is about reenacting that inadequacy in praise of God.

Milton doesn't quite present it this way, but it's close. Consider God's explanation of how he gave mankind free will so that they could freely choose obedience to him. If sin is separation from God, though, this free will is itself a form of sin. And God all but says this, emphasizing the fact that he created them with the freedom to fall. Read this way, the very act of speaking is a declaration of rebellion - to even utter the word "I" is to identify one's self as a subject separate from God, fallen and in sin. This is, in the end, the entire point of Satan's damnation due to ego, and to the fact that it is pride and egotism that serve as Eve's weakness: it is the very fact that they are individuals that damns them. And so every time they speak and assert themselves to be so they talk themselves into trouble.

This may not seem like a huge problem for Moldbug, who, after all, rejects the theological God who underpins Milton's little trap. But in this instance he's hoist upon his own petard; like Dawkins, he's retained too much of the underlying structure for rejecting the metaphysics to make any difference. Moldbug may not believe in the all-knowing atemporal creator God, but he

believes in the existence of the inherent and indisputable authority God represents. And the problem of language as sin thus still applies: to speak is to rebel against authority. The submission to authority that Moldbug craves - "I set myself to the problem of *finding a good King*," as he memorably proclaims at one point, weirdly ecstatic italics his - is precisely what a red pill merchant like himself can never offer.

But Land isn't going to yield so easily. (Hell, even Yudkowsky requires more than Stanley Fish's reading of Milton to comprehensively dismantle.) His project is not in the least bit utopian, and the notion of intrinsic rightness is not so much absent from his thought as largely irrelevant to it. Certainly he's no stranger to postmodernist conceptions of language; they were a primary subject of his early academic work, which followed in the same Burroughs "language is a virus" tradition as cyberpunk. That's the entire point of essays like "A zIIgōthIc-==X=cōDA==-(CōōkIng-lōbsteRs-wIth-jAke-AnD-DInōs)" (excerpt: "AusChwItz-Is-AlphAbet—euRōpe-fuCkfACe—AlChemICAl=tRAnsubstAntIatIōn—AnD—metRōpōlIs—+——+——AusChwItz-Is-the-futuRe"). His stated mission was to "hack the Human Security System," by which he meant the basic parameters of human consciousness. And so the suggestion that language itself is a tool of the Cathedral would hardly bother him. That's more or less his point. I mean, we're talking about a guy whose endgame is "and then the rich elites evolve face tentacles." (Tentacle is the new cannibal.) The point isn't the retention of human civilization and its trappings. Humanity is just the prison that capitalism might escape from.

Still, we've at least clarified our problem a little. Note that both Milton's trap and our takedown of Moldbug hinge on a similar moment - one where the author sets up an absolute, inescapable either/or. In Milton, either you submit to God or you sin by separating yourself. In Moldbug, either you support order and thus the inherent legitimacy of authority, or you are an evil, chaotic dissenter. Moments like this are ripe for hacks, Satanic inversions, and other such tomfooleries. Unsurprisingly - they are moments where a thinker is going to behave in relatively predictable ways. If you can reduce a question to a matter of order versus chaos, Moldbug's position is inevitable. If you can reduce one to sin or obedience to God, so is Milton's. And it's usually pretty easy to do something tricksy with a binary opposition. You either find a third

way, take the one the author didn't take, or show that the choice is an illusion. So let's look for such a moment in Land.

The obvious choice is the Great Filter. It is, after all, the ultimate in binary oppositions, which is why Land positions it as the ur-Horror in the first place - the great cosmic matter of life or death. And it's ultimately the backstop his entire face tentacles ending hinges on. Survival either requires tribal loyalties and large piles of guns or it requires capitalist acceleration towards the bionic horizon. In one option we enjoy a slow extinction at the hands of the Malthusian limits of our planet. In the other we become something monstrous and unthinkable, that being the only sort of thing that can possibly make it through the Great Filter.

The trouble is, Land's already anticipated all the usual tricks. We can't take the option he doesn't take because he's coy about which one he actually favors or believes possible. Indeed, in one blog post he explicitly sets up the dualism between "ultra-capitalism or a return to monkey business" while ostentatiously declining to commit to one or the other for "occult strategic considerations." Because, of course, the trick is that he's gotten both of them to follow from Moldbug. Nor can we really take a third way. The Great Filter is, as noted, as absolute a binary as they come.

Denying the choice offers some promise, and of course there's much to pick at in his specific tactical assessments of the best options for either case. For instance, we might argue that maximizing the amount of time we are alive as a species is best performed by people other than white nationalists, or that capitalism's inability to adequately consider ecological catastrophe renders it unfit for the purpose of bringing about a posthuman future. But the truth is that on both points it's hard to confidently declare that Land is wrong. In the face of an ecologically brutal planet, the guys with guns and tribal loyalties are a depressingly compelling bet to stick around. And the idea that the posthuman would leave the merely human behind to die is an irreducible risk to the very idea of the posthuman, as Yudkowsky would ultimately point out. You can argue that he might be wrong - but good luck getting rid of the itching, creeping dread that it might be you instead. Which leaves only denying the Filter's existence. And to be fair, there are plenty of other explanations for the Fermi Paradox available, so you can absolutely do that. We, unfortunately, cannot because we began this book with the sentence "let us assume that we are fucked."

We can, of course, simply move on to trying a different vulnerability, and there is one that we can distill out of the hauntological/Weird trick we're going to use to get into his system in the first place. But at this point that

would be dishonest. We walked into this little trap, after all. This is the fight we came here to have. If our pwnage of Land doesn't address the Great Filter then it doesn't really address Land.

The bit of Land that's sticking, ultimately, is that unlike Milton and Moldbug he's a philosophical pessimist and a nihilist, meticulously keeping his potentially subvertable positive investments to a bare minimum. So let's have a look at another nihilist. Unfortunately, we don't have one in our repertoire of philosophical puppets, although Thacker is pretty close. But if we want to figure out how to launch exploits on a nihilist, we probably want to go to the extreme. And there is nobody who has articulated a more deeply nihilistic position than Thomas Ligotti.

Ligotti is an interesting figure. For most of his literary career he was a horror writer who toiled in obscurity save for among other horror writers, where his reputation was that of a genius. His style was firmly in the weird fiction tradition that can broadly be defined as "writers who appear on lists that begin with H.P. Lovecraft," but, as he does with most things, he occupied an extreme end of this, transforming his own debilitating anxiety and anhedonia into stories of unsettling dream logic in which it is never quite clear what the object of horror even is, despite the stories being unequivocally terrifying. But in 2011 he published a nonfiction work, *The Conspiracy Against the Human Race*, a non-academic work of philosophy.

He is also tangentially but undeniably connected with our little nexus of writers. *The Conspiracy Against the Human Race* bears a brief introduction by Ray Brassier, who also co-edited *Fanged Noumena*, the main collection of Land's writings. And while politically Ligotti is a socialist (although what precisely that means given his belief that the ideal world would be one in which humanity had no more than animal consciousness is complex), he's also recorded music with neo-folk band Current 93, whose relationship with white nationalism requires one to ask questions like "is there such a thing as a good use of the swastika post-1933" (and that's the nice end of neo-folk). Moreover, between his surprisingly large popular influence (Matthew McConaughey's character in *True Detective* directly pastiches *The Conspiracy Against the Human Race*) and the sheer absolutism of his philosophical pessimism, he serves as a useful place to do some test sketches of what productive responses to nihilism might look like.

The Conspiracy Against the Human Race is a tricky book. In terms of structure and content it is a work of philosophy, but it eschews the sort of rigor typical of the genre. Instead it seeks to craft what might be described as a credible view - a position worth taking seriously. In this regard its subtitle, "A

Contrivance of Horror," is apropos, and the book must firmly be taken in the same spirit as Ligotti's fiction. Its purpose is to sketch an unsettling and awful possibility, and to allow this possibility to linger in the mind of its reader.

Ligotti's basic position is to reject the position held by the overwhelming majority of humanity, which he characterizes as "being alive is all right." In his view, consciousness is an evolutionary misstep best corrected by voluntary extinction. The central problem of consciousness is not unlike the one of language that Fish identifies in Milton: it can't actually do its job. Just as language transgresses against God by asserting itself, consciousness exists in constant and anxious opposition to the knowledge of its own inevitable death. To be conscious of one's existence is to have all of the biological impulses for survival common to life but to be aware that these impulses are doomed.

Crucially, this is not a position about the primacy of nature - a claim that the world would be better off without us. Ligotti's position towards nature is one of unabashed fury - complete and utter outrage that it would ever generate something as crushingly stupid as consciousness. In his view, "once we settle ourselves off-world, we can blow up this planet from outer space. It's the only way to be sure its stench will not follow us." Ligotti's position is not anti-humanist, but rather anti-existence. In his view, nothing is self-justifying, and thus everything is in the end fundamentally useless.

As philosophical moves go, it is one of unsettling efficacy. Few indeed are the positions it cannot cut down, as Ligotti demonstrates with repeated and casual wit throughout the book. We might imagine, for instance, the swiftness with which it would dismantle the Miltonian position simply by blinking uncomprehendingly as soon as Milton begins to speak (and thus to sin) and asking "why are you doing that," to which there is no possible response that Milton could ever give. His famed task of justifying the ways of God to men is, by definition, a claim that God's decision to cast man out and demand that man return of his own free will appears unjustifiable, not least because it blatantly is. And Ligottian reasoning can similarly dismantle Moldbug, whose proclamation that "evil is chaos; good is order" runs immediately into the problem that a temporally bounded world in which things constantly change (i.e. the one we live in) must therefore be an inherently evil one in which his desire for order is as contemptible as it is doomed.

The problem, such as it is, is that it's a scorched-earth tactic. Sure, you can dispatch inept authoritarians with glee, but no alternatives stand up any better to your newfound philosophical weaponry, including, ultimately, Ligotti's own, a point he's well aware of and keen to point out repeatedly. As he observes in the book's denouement, "being somebody is rough, but being nobody is out

of the question." The pessimistic position he offers comes to no useful conclusion either. "What do we care about the horror of being insufferably aware we are alive and will die," he asks. "We are staying put, but you can go extinct if you like." In other words, go ahead and declare that Ligotti wins; you still don't.

But let's try to take a snapshot of the Ligottian critique as it autodestructs. The issue, at the end of the day, is that we don't want to die; that's always the issue with Ligotti. Being nobody, after all, is only out of the question because of our basic certainty that we're going to eventually be just that. It's not that we can't be nobody - it's that we don't want to be, or, rather, because we want not to be. Which is to say that at the final flickering instant of his line of thought, Thomas Ligotti does the only thing he possibly can do: he makes an affirmative commitment, just like he said he would all along.

But wait a moment. That's not the only affirmative commitment he's made. He also really wants to blow up the planet, for instance. Crucially, though, this is instrumental towards a larger goal - a desire for justice in the face of the monstrous concoction that is consciousness. Elsewhere, he expresses the idea that this would be a sort of mercy, saying that "to push that button, to depopulate the earth and arrest its rotation as well - what satisfaction, as of a job prettily done. This would be for the good of all, for even those who know nothing about the conspiracy against the human race are among its injured parties."

Unsettlingly, this line of thought jibes with the Ligottian refutations of Milton and Moldbug as well. If God's actions are unjustifiable, best undo them. If chaos is the real good and order the real evil, best destroy it all. But some caveats have to be put in place here. For one thing, the "we don't want to die" problem flares up. Which is to say that Moldbug still has a point - even if we make the ultimate formalist analysis of power and declare that nature's genocidal vendetta against humanity and willingness to, if it comes to it, turn the sun into a red giant and incinerate the earth means that chaos is the true good, we can't actually short-circuit the innate sense that cleanliness is more desirable than messiness. We must also recognize that Ligotti's position is on a very fundamental level anti-suffering. His central image is one of a quiet, orderly cessation of business. His desire is to be dead, but not to go through the terrifying agony of death. Which is to say that pushing a button and ending it all in a swift and fiery cataclysm is fine, whereas the slow attrition of the human population due to a succession of wars and famines is less so.

Already, then, it becomes possible to clarify the specific issue we are having with Nick Land. Ligotti even describes something very much like the Great

Filter in the final paragraph of *The Conspiracy Against the Human Race*, writing, "there will come a day for each of us - and then for all of us - when the future will be done with. Until then, humanity will acclimate itself to every new horror that comes knocking, as it has done from the very beginning. It will go on and on until it stops. And the horror will go on, with generations falling into the future like so many bodies into open graves." But for Ligotti, unlike Land, it matters how we go.

Ultimately this is the biggest flaw in Land and his entire accelerationist project: none of the ends that he points towards are satisfying ones. Perhaps, as he suggests in some of his more recent work, "the 'monster' (Vauung) is the war. It feeds upon escalation, zig-zagging between antagonists, to extinguish any inclinations towards peace," (note that Vauung is both the name he gave his shattered self in "A Dirty Joke" and, as he says in the same blogpost that quote is from, Kabbalistcally related to the word for "language," as well as the medium of Twitter) and his grim assessment that the neoreactionaries are your best bet for survival in that case is entirely accurate. But even if he is, quite bluntly, we ought begin exploring other ways to go, positioning ourselves on the railroad tracks so that the onrushing Great Filter will kill us as quickly and painlessly as possible. (I'd assume bioterrorism is the best approach, personally; it seems the perfect mixture of killing everybody, relative painlessness, and being achievable by as close to an individual actor as possible.)

Actually, it's worth noting that Ligotti, just before he proposes his would-be extinctionist, discusses at length the idea of Terror Management Theory, a school of psychology that suggests that most human behavior is motivated by a fear of death (certainly a fair read on Yudkowsky, whose fear of death is so pathological and absolute that he refers to people who do not sign up for cryonics - a process that is both expensive and, scientifically speaking, utter bullshit - as "deathists"), specifically suggesting that, as Ligotti summarizes it, "in lieu of personal immortality, we are willing to accept the survival of persons and instutitions that we regard as extensions of us - *our* families, *our*, heroes, *our* religions, *our* countries," which leads inexorably towards an attitude of "genocide against outsiders who impinge upon them and *their* world" in order to preserve this desired future. Ligotti notes wryly that "promulgators of TMT believe that a universal dispersion of their ideas will make people more tolerant of the alien worldviews of others and not kill them," observing that "this is just another worldview that brandishes itself as the best worldview in the world." Although Ligotti is not actively talking about neoreaction here, most of the argument ports over fairly neatly. The description of what we

substitute for personal immortality is, ultimately, exactly the sort of tribalism that makes up Land and Moldbug's racism; his mockery of TMT's solution of bland tolerance is scarcely different from their critique of liberal democracy. The Ligottian terrorist, in other words, is Ligotti's intended response to people like Land.

But Land's overall apparatus can survive the loss of neoreaction relatively unscathed, and the terrorist is hardly Ligotti's overall stopping point either. Controlled demolition is a reasonable aspiration, but various circumstances put it out of reach, and it is, to attack it on as Ligottian terms as possible, a useless line of thought for the overwhelming majority of us who are never going to find our fingers upon the button with which we can tidily and satisfyingly mothball the planet. As Ligotti observes, the odds are overwhelming that the future is going to happen.

No, Ligotti's endpoint is something altogether subtler and stranger, and it is one that emphasizes how little *The Conspiracy Against the Human Race* differs from his other work: that the experience of consciousness is one of horror. And so he ends, inevitably, with a discussion of the supernatural; not the utopian supernatural of God or Friendly AI (which he rejects with a swipe akin to Roko's Basilisk - the suggestion that "the ideal being standing at the end of evolution may deduce that the best of all possible worlds is useless, if not malignant, and that the self-extinction of our future selves would be the optimal course to take") but the supernatural as the thing we think should not be. As he puts it, "everywhere around us are natural habitats, but within us is the shiver of startling and dreadful things. Simply put: *We are not from here*." We are ourselves the supernatural, and to the supernatural horror of death we shall return.

There's a way out here, and it's an obvious one if you're a Thomas Ligotti fan, which is to start enjoying horror. And while Ligotti is clear that there's no way to accomplish this for once and for all, he's equally clear that we find an endless succession of ways to more or less fake it more or less often enough to get by. But as understood by Ligotti - which is to say in terms of contact with the outside - it's actually a bit of a problem for Land. Ligotti ultimately creates a fairly robust coping mechanism, if only by implication. If we are from "out there" but terrified to actually return, we can at least invite more of the outside in to join us. As Ligotti puts it, "leashed to the supernatural, we know its signs and try to tame them by desensitization and lampoonery. We study them as symbols, play games with them." It's a crude stalling mechanism, but so is everything. At least it gives us our much-needed next thing to do.

But for Land there is the inescapable problem of his madness. He actively sought contact with the outside, and broke himself doing so. Now he recoils at its touch. "Don't ask for a sign," he writes in *Phyl-Undhu*. "You have a billion signs a minute that you don't want. You're already in The Flood." There's too much outside, in other words. It's everywhere; it's breaking in. We need some respite from it. And from this to the Cracker Factory, whose "function is to block off all the exits," and thus to racial tribalism.

At this point we have all the pieces we need for our attack on Land. Recall, after all, what our insertion point was: his failure to recognize the interchangeability of the hauntological and the Weird. Which Miéville defined, in effect, in terms of whether the monstrosity comes from inside or outside. So Land is caught in a troubling bind. He's fascinated by the Weird because it comes from the outside, but he ultimately has to reject it. But anything you could import from the Weird can just as easily come in through the hauntological. And so as a defense, Land's line against the outside is, as Ligotti would put it, malignantly useless.

What happens if we draw the line in the opposite position, though? That is to say, what if we take a line against the inside in the same way Land adamantly refuses the outside's offer post-madness? At first blush it is difficult even to imagine what this would mean. Rejecting the outside seems intuitive, but rejecting the inside seems an impossibility - as though one is rejecting the very idea of identity. But if we're not from here, what good can the inside possibly be? As Ligotti aptly demonstrates, an uncompromising line against interiority is manifestly possible.

In an odd way, Land gives us the perfect description of this necessary alternative when he's describing white nationalist identity and says that "because 'whiteness' is a limit (pure absence of color), it slips smoothly from the biological factuality of the Caucasian sub-species into metaphysical and mystical ideas. Rather than accumulating genetic variation, a white race is contaminated or polluted by admixtures that compromise its defining negativity – to darken it is to destroy it." Such a creature as this is uniquely capable of drawing a line against the inside for the precise reason that there is no inside - its identity is a pure absence and negativity. The line, in other words, is drawn already.

Land describes this identity as "besieged," and it's hard not to think of his coinage of The Flood here - the billion unwanted signals swarming in from the outside. But if The Flood is useless, at least it doesn't seem malignantly so: its problem is merely one of insufficiency. The inside is useless because it's empty, but the outside is useless because it's infinite. Sure, there are a billion

unwanted signals, but that's still not all of the possible signals. There could always still be something else out there. So if we cannot take advantage the right to exit, and both Ligotti and Land are very clear on the fact that we can't, we might yet be able to salvage the right to be invaded.

On a basic level, this is nothing more than a straightforward inversion. All I'm doing is taking the white nationalist monster that Land describes and embracing what it hates. And let's be clear, it would scarcely be possible to come up with a notion more loathsome to this particular breed of reactionary shithead than the right to be invaded. It's a pathological terror within the neoreactionary community, exemplified by things like their bizarre obsession with the idea of cuckolding, including the formulation of the word "cuckservative" to describe supposedly conservative politicians who were weak on immigration and thus allowing the nation's gene pool to be cuckolded. No, seriously, that's a thing.

More than just embracing what white nationalism hates, clearly, I'm embracing what it fears. Because, after all, it is blatantly the sense of being under siege that Land ascribes to white nationalism - a constant fear. What Land is doing is taking his own post-madness terror of the outside and finding the element within western democracy that shares it, then presenting that as a terrifying monster. And fair enough: he's not entirely wrong. White nationalists are scary. But why?

Let's get the obvious possibility out of the way. It's not because they're right in some fundamental sense. Land's "biological factuality of the Caucasian sub-species" is nothing of the sort; its non-existence is as settled science as the anthropocene extinction. More broadly, the entire idea of scientific racism (and neoreactionaries, with their deep ties to the technolibertarian/"rationalist" tradition, are deeply "scientific" in their racism, with "human biodiversity" being their current code word of choice) is a preposterous house of cards consisting of people desperately trying to bludgeon science back into supporting discredited Victorian ideas about why black people are inherently less intelligent than white people. This ends up being a sort of Goldilocks-style farce in which various scientific definitions of "race" are tried on only to, without exception, either divide populations too finely to actually make the desired generalizations or to create categories so broad as to be genetically meaningless. Race, as employed in the colloquial sense, is a clumsy attempt to classify people based on general patterns of physical appearance (most notably melanin levels) correlating to geographic distribution during the period where Europe was mapping/conquering the world.

It is not that there is no relationship between geographic ancestry and genetic makeup - the Wikipedia article you're looking for is "Human Y-chromosome DNA haplogroup" - but the genetic differences across haplogroups are of negligible significance in any direct "some people are inherently less intelligent" sense even before you even get to the massive eyebrow raise that is the statement "intelligence is accurately measured by IQ tests," upon which most of these claims depend. In practice any correlations emerging from haplogroups are dwarfed by those emerging from environmental factors such as lead exposure, childhood nutrition, and economic development. (For a sense of how useless the claims of scientific racism are, the supposed couple point IQ difference that exists between black and white people is vastly smaller than the IQ difference between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland in the 1970s. Even Moldbug ultimately admits this is a load of crap, and he thinks black people make good slaves.)

In other words, the "metaphysical and mystical ideas" of whiteness that Land mentions is literally the whole of the issue. Or, to put it in the near-universally agreed upon terms of sociology, race is a social construct. This is not, as neoreactionaries would immediately have it, to say that race does not exist. Rather it's to say that race is a phenomenon that occurs in society, not a genetic phenomenon. Indeed, the example Land weirdly obsesses upon in "The Dark Enlightenment," the shooting of Trayvon Martin, is indicative. Land writes at some length about the sense of awkwardness that much of the media (he calls it the Cathedral of course) had when instead of being "a hulking, pasty-faced, storm-trooper look-alike, hopefully some kind of Christian gun-nut, and maybe – if they really hit pay-dirt – a militia movement type with a history of homophobia and anti-abortion activism" George Zimmerman turned out to be "a 'white Hispanic' (a category that seems to have been rapidly innovated on the spot)" until his identity "gradually shifted through a series of ever more reality-compliant ethnic complications." And he's right that Zimmerman's ethnicity was misreported in some of the early stories on the shooting, and that Zimmerman was not some, as Land puts it, "great Amerikkkan defendant."

Unfortunately, Land is almost completely talking out of his ass about the details. This isn't surprising; Land's a Brit who lives in China, and his sense of the nuances of American racial politics seems to come from watching television. But the error he makes is profoundly revealing. At the heart of it is Land's crack about "white hispanic" identity, which had in reality been reflected on the US Census since 2000 by the decision to decouple race and ethnicity, allowing people to identify separately as "white or black" and

"Hispanic or not Hispanic." This, in turn, reflects the fact that many Hispanic countries have their own distinctions between "black" and "white," and, more broadly, the fact that race is actually really fucking complicated. Zimmerman was the child of a white guy of Germanic descent (hence the surname) and a Peruvian immigrant who had an Afro-Peruvian (which is to say black) grandmother. Between his name and complexion he could safely be described as "white-passing," which is to say that if he didn't want people to instinctively identify him as Hispanic he was generally capable of ensuring that. Trayvon Martin, on the other hand, was named "Trayvon" and never went a moment of his life without being identified as "black." Or, to put it another way - and this was the actual issue that pushed Martin's death into the news - if a black teenager had shot a white guy named George Zimmerman on the street he'd have been arrested without question, "stand your ground" laws or not, and everyone knew it. And in that event, the detail that Zimmerman was "actually Hispanic and technically black in the one-drop sense" would never have come up because a black teenager getting arrested doesn't go beyond the local news. Except, of course, you can't shoot someone with a bag of Skittles.

The strangely stuttering tone with which the media handled this (relatively simple) story about race and violence was not, in other words, evidence of some underlying incoherence in the narrative that most people instinctively saw in the story, but a misguided concession to the factually wrong idea of "scientific" race that Land is trying to give credit to. In other words, it's only because racist assholes who not only thought it was no big deal that some black hoodlum got shot for being uppity but were outraged that anyone might think otherwise decided to claim that "it wasn't even because he was black because neither was Zimmerman" that the meaningless detail of George Zimmerman, in addition to having a Haplogroup R1b father, having a mother of Haplogroup C and a direct ancestor of Haplogroup E came to be discussed on the national news in the scientifically imprecise terms of "blackness" and "whiteness" in the first place.

And this is, in a nutshell, what's scary about white nationalists - a fear eloquently articulated by Land's heroic racist John Derbyshire, whom he quotes in the epigraph to Part 4a, the start of his "multi-part sub-digression into racial terror" as saying, "my own sense of the thing is that underneath the happy talk, underneath the dogged adherence to failed ideas and dead theories, underneath the shrieking and anathematizing at people like me, there is a deep and cold despair. In our innermost hearts, we don't believe racial harmony can be attained." And it's true - the possibility that racism is an intractable and permanent problem is a scary one that has to be considered regardless of

one's certainty that there is no moral or rational basis for discrimination based on race. It's just that the reason racism might be insoluble is less, as Derbyshire suggests, a fundamental "trend to separation" and more that there are still white people like John Derbyshire who are inclined to wax poetic about the precise reasons they hate black people, and that they exist in dangerously high numbers. This is not to deny the existence of racism even on the progressive left, nor to say that progressive racism is not just as much of a long-term danger. Rather, it's to point out the practical scariness of white nationalists: their presence ensures that an intelligent or productive discussion of race is always going to be poisoned by a bunch of dipshits chiming in to rant about human biodiversity.

Underpinning all of this is the fact that the white nationalist horror is a mythology. This is what underlies the "Zimmerman is white in every way that matters" issue that underpinned the Trayvon Martin shooting - that his whiteness is almost wholly negative, coming from the ability to avoid being viewed as black or Hispanic or anything else. But there's an inherent paranoia at the heart of this: the white nationalist monster, historically significant as it is and will be, has a glaring weak point in the form of its own monstrous terror of being invaded or violated. And moreover, that monster carries a power of its own, and one that is based in the same mythology as white nationalism.

Because, of course, the other way to describe whiteness instead of being not-seen-as-nonwhite is simply as being seen as "normal." And the idea that appearing at first glance like someone who probably has European ancestry is "normal" is a concept that emerges out of historical systems of power that emerged from Europe - systems of power, notably, that include both Moldbug's beloved monarchy and hated dissenters. Simply put, it was Europe that finished the task of mapping the world. European culture became the first global and near-universally known culture; it was the first memetic global pandemic.

In practical terms, of course, this pandemic was accomplished at weapon-point, a fact encompassed neatly in the factoid that there are exactly twenty-two countries in the world that have never been invaded by the British. And this is where the right to be invaded draws its almost primal power from: the one thing European culture is unique in never having experienced is being taken over by another culture.

VI.

"Out from the kitchen to the bedroom to the hallway, your friend apologizes; he could see it my way. He let the contents of the bottle do the thinking. Can't shake the devil's hand and say you're only kidding. This is where the party ends." - They Might Be Giants, *"Your Racist Friend"*

It would probably help to have some idea of non-white culture, then. But Trayvon Martin was the first person of color to come up in the book, and he's not really a philosopher. There are, of course, any number of thinkers on the subject of race and identity worth introducing. The point of this exercise is not to come up with some universal theory of non-whiteness. Rather it is to come up with any theory of non-whiteness whatsoever - a vague starting point from which to start imagining our new post-invasion identities. For arcane reasons related mainly to my endgame (yes, I have one), I propose Frantz Fanon.

Fanon was born on Martinique, a French colony, to a middle-class family, but the defining incident in his life came in 1940 after France fell to Germany, resulting in the French troops on Martinique, who were blockaded, simply taking over the island and creating a collaborationist regime. Fanon fled the island three years later, fighting in the Free French army until the liberation of France, at which point he and other non-white soldiers were quietly dropped from the army due to the presence of photojournalists. But he returned to France after finishing school in Martinique, studying medicine, psychiatry, literature, and philosophy before writing his first book, *Black Skin, White Masks*.

The central idea of this book is as he puts it, that "the black man has two dimensions," one defined internally, within the black community, and the other defined by the white community, and specifically by the way in which he must "act white" for their sake. In many ways this idea is an adaptation of W.E.B. DuBois's "double consciousness" (Fanon prefers "dual consciousness"), which he describes as a "sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity." But where DuBois frames it in terms of being looked at by the white world, Fanon frames it in terms of the performance put on - the second role and identity that is put on. But the end result is similar - as DuBois describes it, "one ever feels his twoness, - an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder."

It is of course difficult to adapt an idea like this straightforwardly. So much of it is built out of the real and lived experience of DuBois and Fanon - in the real phenomenon of anger and pain that eventually found its expression in these ideas. But this is not a new problem - we did not, after all, let ourselves get unduly bothered about how Land's breakdown or Ligotti's illnesses rendered their work singular. The suffering that underpins these ideas is part of their power, but it is not the whole of it. Dual consciousness, within Fanon, is in no way a pleasurable situation. Rather it's a constant oppression - a gravity weighing on every moment of black life. But its misery is by and large a product of the historical circumstances in which this dual consciousness arose - the genuinely awful reality of life in Martinique. Might better circumstances produce a better dual consciousness?

To some extent, no. The underlying problem with dual consciousness - that its subject will want to reconcile the two in a way that is ultimately impossible - is intractable. It's also nothing we haven't already seen in Milton or Ligotti, though. And while we might not be able to engineer a dual consciousness free of existential angst, it certainly seems possible to create one without brutal structures of colonial oppression and the attendant sense of humiliation and degradation. But that still doesn't quite answer the real question underlying this, which is whether it's possible to produce a dual consciousness that is in some sense desirable.

The answer is yes, obviously, or we wouldn't be doing this. But more surprising is that the best example of it that we've seen so far is Eliezer Yudkowsky. Dual consciousness is exactly what Yudkowsky creates in coming up with ways to talk to the future AI-god that will make him immortal. Let's look at how the whole "acausal trade" thing actually gets established. Yudkowsky created it to solve something called Newcomb's Problem, which is a thought experiment where a being that can perfectly predict a human's actions presents them with two boxes, one transparent and the other opaque. Inside the transparent box is $1000. Inside the other one, however, is either $1,000,000 or nothing. The subject is allowed to take just the opaque box or both boxes. However the being has chosen whether the opaque box is empty or not based on their prediction of what the human will do - if it predicts they will take both boxes it is empty, but if it predicts they will just take the opaque one it has $1,000,000 in it. What should the subject do?

The reason this is tricky is that the subject's choice is not actually affecting the contents of the boxes, and so taking both boxes is necessarily going to have either the same payout as taking one or a larger payout. And yet the predictions are defined as effectively perfect - to take two boxes is to guarantee

that the second box is empty. The obvious solution is to declare that magical beings that can perfectly predict human behavior are inherently silly ideas and that the entire problem is more interesting than it is important, but since Yudkowsky wants to be reincarnated as a perfect simulation by a futuristic artificial intelligence he doesn't think that. Instead he sees Newcomb's Problem as a very important issue and creates an entire new model for decision theory whose only real virtue compared to any other is that it offers a better solution to Newcomb's Problem.

The result of this is Timeless Decision Theory, which suggests that the prediction and the problem of picking a box are actually just two iterations of the same problem - an abstract computation roughly of the form "is this person going to pick one box or two." Accordingly, instead of thinking about one's actions in terms of "what am I going to do" one should think about it in terms of "what is the output of the abstract computation of what I'm going to do going to be."

But what's key about it is that it involves turning free will into a sort of self-prediction. To engage in Timeless Decision Theory is to create a dual consciousness, simultaneously looking at one's self as the person making a decision and as a person who evaluates your decision-making process externally. Indeed, to truly embrace Timeless Decision Theory as a form of rationality - a way to interact with the world - is to live in a self-imposed panopticon, making every decision as though one is deciding the predictions of an imaginary being that can perfectly predict you. One can imagine the dual consciousness that weighs on a Timeless Decision Theorist, wondering what their Predictor thinks of every little decision they make; their shoes, their job, their sexual tastes.

But crucially, that's the point. That's why this leads to Roko's Basilisk. The whole reason Yudkowsky is doing this is so that he can be in constant communion with the AI-god he aspires to live forever as a process running on. And indeed, given that, the usual relationship between someone and a Miltonian God looks a lot like dual consciousness as well. And the underlying implication - that religion creates dual consciousness - makes a certain intuitive sense, in that religion, like race, is based on metaphysics and mythology.

None of this is news to Nick Land, whose horror fiction is largely about invasion and contact with the outside. His most recent, *Chasm*, even has as an ostentatious Lovecraft-style racist savage muttering cryptically about dark things and at a key moment unexpectedly speaking perfect English to boot. But that's not surprising; Land's always had a clear regard for Yudkowsky, even if only to the extent of wanting to tease him about Roko's Basilisk. And we

should expect to see an almost fractal quality to the concept when we get this close to the heart of it.

Anyway, there's a larger implication in Yudkowsky's line of thought. The central perversity of Timeless Decision Theory is that it replaces the illusion of free will with the illusion of the Predictor's constant companionship. But the way that Yudkowsky can make this surprise conflation of individual consciousness and the alien brain parasite that will be riding within it for all time is through the idea of predicting someone else's actions. Indeed, the act of prediction would seem to be central to the whole idea of dual consciousness. To be dually conscious is to endlessly predict the response of an outside observer and moderate one's own actions to influence them. These are also the tools the AI uses to make Yudkowsky an immortal simulation, and for that matter the tools it uses to get out of the box.

But all of this goes back to Alan Turing, whose near universally misunderstood paper "Computing Machinery and Intelligence" sets out this idea. Under the standard interpretation, this is the paper in which he invents what is generally called the Turing Test, a proposed standard for determining whether a machine can think based on whether it can fool a human into thinking they're carrying on a typed conversation with a person instead of a machine. This, however, is a complete misreading of Turing's paper, albeit one that's easy to make because the paper, being written in 1950, is almost as completely disconnected from any notion of contemporary AI research as Eliezer Yudkowsky and spends most of its length pondering questions like "but what about ESP?"

What Turing actually proposes, however, is considerably subtler and weirder. First he sets up what he calls "the imitation game," a which requires three people, a man, a woman, and an interrogator. The interrogator talks with both the man and woman via typed conversation, asking them questions, and then attempts to identify the actual woman. Turing then says, "we now ask the question, 'What will happen when a machine takes the part of A in this game?' Will the interrogator decide wrongly as often when the game is played like this as he does when the game is played between a man and a woman? These questions replace our original, 'Can machines think?'" In other words, the test is not, as it is commonly taken to be, "can a machine use language," but rather "can a machine do as well as a human male at impersonating a human female?"

This has several implications, including an unsettling one about how men are the default setting and women are unfathomable aliens, a pathology that is perhaps understandable given Turing's personal biography but that seems to

have had a dispiritingly large impact on nerd culture going forward. Past that, it connects to the rest of Turing's thought in a way the language-based interpretation of the Turing Test does not. Turing was not a linguist, and his research had no particular connection with the field. It did, however, have a tremendous relationship with the idea of imitation. The other major thing named after him is the Turing Machine, a simple theoretical model for a computer that turns out to be capable of solving any problem that can be solved on a modern computer or on any other theoretical computer devised to date. One of the many things a Turing Machine turns out to be capable of doing is taking the design of another Turing Machine as input, along with a set of inputs appropriate for that second machine and then running calculations about the machine, including simulating what it would do.

This is called a Universal Turing Machine, and is central to one of Turing's most important contributions to mathematics, a proof that the halting problem cannot be solved. It's also, however, structurally similar to the imitation game, making it a stunning case of Turing using the same solution for two very different problems. In both cases, Turing ends up defining a mode of thinking in terms of its ability to model another mode of thinking. The imitation game ultimately hinges on the ability of a man or a machine to successfully imagine the mind of a woman, just as the Universal Turing Machine requires a sort of imagining of another Turing Machine. And this is also clearly what goes on in Yudkowsky's idea of prediction, or indeed, of reincarnating him as an immortal computer program.

The obvious umbrella term for this is "empathy," and that word leads to most of the other implications, as it's one that comes up in a lot of critiques of neoreaction and of the sorts of people who like to call themselves "rationalists." But before any of that come up there's a very big philosophical statement to make, which is that Alan Turing suggests that the fundamental nature of thought and, by implication, of humanity is the capacity for empathy, in much the same way that enlightenment liberalism suggests that it is free will and Ligotti suggests that it is consciousness.

This is not an entirely novel idea; Aristotle, after all, proclaimed man to be an "imitative creature" in the *Poetics*, which remains the fundamental basis for literally all understanding of narrative in the western world millennia after its composition. Countless philosophical and psychological concepts can be argued to be along these lines with no more than a paragraph or two's work, not least the opposition between Will Graham's profiling ability, explicitly based in an excess of empathy, and Hannibal's carnal aesthetic. But the right to be invaded is clearly among them. Empathy is what distinguishes invasion

from destruction; the means by which a relationship between the inside and outside is forged and maintained. It is also what enables invasion to be desirable; contact with the outside becomes something we are hardwired to want, and the inclination to exercise the faculty of empathy so that we can imagine things more and more alien to ourselves is as natural as the inclination to exercise our legs or mental faculties.

The concept of empathy is particularly interesting, however, because it manages to be a key that opens every lock. All three of our main thinkers fail in key ways to grapple with empathy. As one would expect, Land comes closest to working meaningfully with the concept. In many regards his early academic work can be read as an experiment in radical empathy - an attempt to explore what the limits of understanding are. As *Fanged Noumena* co-editor Robin Mackay puts it, "Land saw thanatos – the death-drive, the unknown outside – insinuating its way into the human by way of eros. The unbridled production of new brands of erotic adventure within capitalism ushered in a transformation of the human, cutting its bonds with the (cultural, familial, and ultimately biological) past and opening it up to new, inorganic distributions of affect. Compared to the known – the strata of organic redundancy in which 'the human' was interred – such unknowns were to be unhesitatingly affirmed." But this statement exists in stark contrast with his *Phyl-Undhu*-era focus on the unknown as a source of horror, and that contrast largely defines Land's neoreactionary turn. In other words, Land's engagement with empathy is for the most part a conscious and mindful rejection of it.

In the end, though… well, his rejection still sucks. It's not that he's wrong in finding horror within the notion of empathy. We arrived at the concept via Thomas Ligotti, after all. But Land overplays his hand, acting as though empathy is just horror as opposed to something that is, among other things, scary. As a result, he ends up siding with a bunch of racist morons just because those are the other people who are as terrified of the outside world as him. And yes, there's something genuinely compelling about that turn, but it's ultimately just that it's pretty clear that turn was a consequence of his going mad, and madness and horror go together well. And, look, not to put too fine a point on it, but the major lesson to take from Land's madness is not that any of the concepts he was working with were mere inches from some devastating red pill, it's that you shouldn't take so many fucking amphetamines. In other words, however deliberate Land's rejection of empathy is, it's still his biggest flaw.

As for Moldbug, the problem is subtler, in that he has an almost pathological disinterest in the notion. In the entirety of *Unqualified Reservations*

it comes up three times, all in an especially rambling post about how America is a communist country in which he avoids ever actually mentioning Marx. But its absence is revealing of a larger tendency and failing on Moldbug's part. At the heart of Moldbug's fundamental failings as a philosopher is his misapplied expertise. He's a good software engineer, and has visibly concluded that because software engineering is hard and history/philosophy are easy if he can do the former well he can obviously do the latter well, and indeed better than people who are actually trained in it. But perhaps the larger problem is simply that he's got some fundamental flaws as a software engineer as well.

To oversimplify a lot of things, there are few fields with as big a disparity in aesthetic ideals and practical realities as programming. Actual software that exists in the world is a bewildering tangle of pragmatic compromises reached by people whose relationship with caffeine as they desperately chase deadlines is analogous to Nick Land's relationship with amphetamines. There is almost no elegant theory or underlying design principle. There is just spur-of-the-moment cleverness soldered together with legacy code with an inefficiency that puts evolution to shame.

On the other hand, Mencius Moldbug - or rather Curtis Yarvin - is an elegant genius of an engineer who creates genuinely revelatory software that serves as an expression of coherent philosophical principles about the very nature of computing. His current project, Urbit, is representative - an ambitious reinvention of the Internet according to first principles. It might even be real software that exists someday as opposed to MIRI-esque vapor. But it's nearly useless. The problems it solves are so bound up in its principles of what security and freedom mean in the context of software design that only a handful of people in the world care about them. It will never catch on, not least because the one practical application of most weird blockchain-type technology except inasmuch as it might have interesting applications for criminal activity (despite Moldbug's no doubt heartfelt insistence that it won't). And perhaps most importantly, it's arguably even more batshit crazy than *Unqualified Reservations*, featuring things like a programming language in which there's an increment operator but no decrement, such that you have to write a recursive function using increments to accomplish what is typically among the simplest things you can do in a programming language. (Even Brainfuck has a decrement operator.) Clearly Yarvin is not the sort of software engineer who spends a lot of time thinking about the user, which is to say, not the sort of software engineer with much empathy.

So when he indulges in philosophy as Moldbug he does it badly in two regards. Not only does he mistakenly believe that he's good at it, the things he

tries to do with it are fundamentally malformed, twisted beasts. That's what's at the heart of his most singularly bizarre declaration, that the purpose of government is profit. Its main appeal isn't even that it's a good idea - although he gloms onto a libertarian intellectual tradition that supports it. No, its real appeal is simply that it lets him objectively measure how well a government is doing, which makes it a lot easier to come up with a clever design for one. And that's the heart of everything that's stupid about Mencius Moldbug's ideas - the problem that leads to his first facepalming stupidity. The reason Mencius Moldbug likes the idea of a king is simply that it represents an efficient and elegant design. That's what his fundamental and absolute dedication to order over chaos is, really. And it leads him to look at slavery as an efficient design that just presents a couple of implementation challenges.

Yudkowsky has much the same problem, only on an even larger scale. With Moldbug the sense is overwhelmingly that empathy just never crossed his mind as something to factor into his design. He flat out didn't think of it. Yudkowsky, on the other hand, thinks about it a lot and cares very deeply about it; he's just incompetent at it. Yudkowsky talks about empathic inference, describing it as "configuring your own brain in a similar state to the brain that you want to predict (in a controlled sort of way that doesn't lead you to actually hit anyone). This may yield good predictions, but that's not the same as understanding. You can predict angry people by using your own brain in empathy mode. But could you write an angry computer program? You don't know how your brain is making the successful predictions. You can't print out a diagram of the neural circuitry involved. You can't formalize the hypothesis; you can't make a well-understood physical system that predicts without human intervention; you can't derive the exact predictions of the model; you can't say what you know."

It is difficult to know where to begin. What is perhaps most perplexing is how clinical the description is. Recall that we got to empathy through imagery of infection, invasion, and trauma. It is not a tame or easy subject. But more significant than the problems of tone are the problems of content. In particular, Yudkowsky's decision to equate "understanding" with the capacity to "make a well-understood physical system that predicts without human intervention" is a move that accuses the overwhelming majority of the human population of not understanding anything whatsoever. It's not that there aren't definitions of "understanding" where that's true, of course, and it's part of what the title *LessWrong* means, but it's notable that he's defined the term out of all practical value.

The result is that he overlooks the ways in which empathy *is* a powerful mode of understanding. Which is part and parcel of its capacity for horror, of course. And the problem recurs throughout Yudkowsky. Look at him talking about emotion: "I label an emotion as 'not rational' if it rests on mistaken beliefs, or rather, on irrational epistemic conduct: 'If the iron approaches your face, and you believe it is hot, and it is cool, the Way opposes your fear. If the iron approaches your face, and you believe it is cool, and it is hot, the Way opposes your calm.' Conversely, then, an emotion which is evoked by correct beliefs or epistemically rational thinking is a 'rational emotion'; and this has the advantage of letting us regard calm as an emotional state, rather than a privileged default. When people think of 'emotion' and 'rationality' as opposed, I suspect that they are really thinking of System 1 and System 2—fast perceptual judgments versus slow deliberative judgments. Deliberative judgments aren't always true, and perceptual judgments aren't always false; so it is very important to distinguish that dichotomy from 'rationality'. Both systems can serve the goal of truth, or defeat it, according to how they are used."

It's tempting to describe this as an attempt to characterize emotion by someone who has never actually had one, although that's unfair. And in another post about emotion he talks quite powerfully about it, acknowledging that "it's *embarrassing* to feel," emphasis his, before saying, "I know, now, that there's nothing wrong with feeling strongly. Ever since I adopted the rule of 'That which can be destroyed by the truth should be,' I've also come to realize 'That which the truth nourishes should thrive.' When something good happens, I am happy, and there is no confusion in my mind about whether it is rational for me to be happy. When something terrible happens, I do not flee my sadness by searching for fake consolations and false silver linings. I visualize the past and future of humankind, the tens of billions of deaths over our history, the misery and fear, the search for answers, the trembling hands reaching upward out of so much blood, what we could become someday when we make the stars our cities, all that darkness and all that light—I know that I can never truly understand it, and I haven't the words to say. Despite all my philosophy I am still embarrassed to confess strong emotions, and you're probably uncomfortable hearing them. But I know, now, that it is rational to feel."

But it's telling that the really powerful part there is the weird religious reverie in the middle about the tens of billions of deaths; the spot where Yudkowsky sublimates himself in the stark realization that Kleio is not some bucolic maiden in a wheat field but a faceless Exterminator stalking civilization

- that history is out to get us. No wonder he feels embarrassed about that emotion; it's really not one for polite company, because it is almost Ligottian in its bleakness. That, in turn, points to the main error in the passage, which is the suggestion that it's normative to feel shame about strong emotions.

I mean, it's not that that's not a thing. It's just that Yudkowsky's kind of talked himself into a circle by the time he gets to it, having opened the post by musing about the misconception that "rationality opposes all emotion." He's trying to tackle the whole Mr. Spock stereotype, but can't quite get out from under the basic value judgment at the heart of it. And so because he's uncomfortable with emotion he ends up weirdly downplaying empathy, treating it, notably, as a thing accomplished by "configuring your own brain" into "empathy mode," as though it's some sort of conscious act of will to be invaded.

Which leads to the real problem, which is that Yudkowsky thinks of empathy in terms of peering into black boxes, and as a thing that is done. The result of this approach is that Yudkowsky, without really meaning to, tends to look at everyone else in the world as inefficient Eliezer Yudkowskys instead of people as such. And this proves to be a major problem when you're proclaiming yourself a visionary genius of rationality. (Ironically, the *LessWrong* crowd talks at length about this sort of error, the Typical Mind Fallacy. As with many fallacies, they're much better at identifying it than avoiding it.)

But the real takeaway is the idea of vilifying emotion and empathy. Which is a common sentiment among the sorts of people who like writers like Yudkowsky and Moldbug. Nick Land, for instance. There's a bigger ideology here, though - one that, at least in terms of Yudkowsky, is perhaps best encapsulated by the ghoulish spectacle of his followers trying to convince the Effective Altruism movement - a school of thought that focuses on quantitative analysis of philanthropy, and that the *LessWrong* crowd had been early proponents of - with a slightly sanitized version of Roko's Basilisk (with logic that was immediately called out for being Pascalian) that claimed that because a malevolent AI would be the worst thing ever, donating to MIRI was more important than malaria nets. But it's also visible in the besieged attitude of white nationalists as well as other ugly corners of the Dark Enlightenment like "Men's Rights Activists" who decry the "irrationality" of women, or chan culture's vocal and explicit hatred of empathy. There is, throughout this corner of the world, a deficiency of empathy that is not merely lack or failure, but an active, conscious disdain. Moldbug, Yudkowsky, and Land don't just "do poorly" with empathy - they represent the most visible and explicit edge of a

Cathedral-scaled system of values that casts the desire to listen and try to understand people who are different from you as anathema to reason itself.

At last, then, we have a credible answer to the most stubbornly worrisome of neoreactionary arguments - that Malthusian limits will eventually reassert themselves and tribal affiliations will reign supreme anyway, so you may as well give up on diversity before it's too late. Perhaps they will, and a historical period of war is inevitable given current conditions. But if so, "values empathy" is just as effective a tribal delineation as any, and probably a fair bit more effective than DNA haplogroups. Put another way, maybe the neoreactionaries are right and we're going to have to shoot some people; if so, let's shoot them first.

And, of course, there's a real temptation to build a contrary system; a vision of the world that takes empathy as its central virtue. It's fertile ground for utopian thinking. Those interested might look further and deeper at Fanon, as well as at Althusser's "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," Debord's *Society of the Spectacle*, Judith Butler's *Giving an Account of Oneself*, Ta-Nehisi Coates's *Between the World and Me*, and generally embrace large quantities of feminist and postcolonial theory. A rigorously thought out system is just a disjointed series of blogposts away.

But that's just denying the truth. The reality is that we're fucked, and that a vision of society based on empathy does not extend productively from late capitalism. At best, it's what we should have done. Nevertheless, we might consider recognizing it as a core vision of ourselves, even if that vision is no more than the story of a cancer patient told to make sense of the notion of the end. If we can't convincingly write it into our future, we can at least write it into our past. I do not particularly mean this in the sense of the progressive tradition that Moldbug and Land ineptly rail against, although I think its more radical aspects are worth exploring further. Indeed, on one level I mean it in an almost classically primitivist sense; a reminder that the foundational elements of this whole experiment in "human civilization" were always based around the act of recognizing the Other, even if only to enslave or kill them. Neoreactionaries are exceedingly fond of their essentialist tales of "human nature"; we ought allow ourselves a myth of our own.

Indeed, let us take this as our final task; the goal for one last pass through the labyrinth of concepts we have thus far mapped. A final stab at sketching the monster at its heart. From here on out, no new thinkers; just a final attempt to bring the overall concept into view. Land identifies a desire for a "white" identity, which, due to its paranoias about purity, is doomed to be a stunted, monstrous thing. We have discarded the paranoia, but we have not

escaped the general question of white identity. And it's a pertinent one, especially given the overwhelming whiteness of the discussion: is there any sort of redemptive vision of white culture to be had? Or is the role of western culture essentially that of the great fuckup, the individualist philosophy that leads inexorably to capitalism having turned out to be a disastrous misstep that ruined the ecology of the planet?

But while we've discarded the paranoia, we've also discarded the utopian conceit that the outside might ever save us. Which is to say that we may have reimagined white culture as wanting to be muddied and transformed, but we've also rejected the means by which to do it. We can't get away from that notion of purity entirely, after all. But instead of purity as an object of paranoia that is, as Land puts it, "besieged," it will have to be something that is an object of mourning - a tragic loss. If whiteness is not something to fetishistically maintain then it is an absence, and indeed a lack.

If one wants to engage in crude psychoanalysis, one might accuse the rank and file neoreactionaries of demonstrating the truth of this, reading their fascination with cuckolding as an ethnosexual version of the gay homophobe (and neoreaction is riddled with both gays and homophobes). And more broadly, anger is an all-too-easy-to-empathize-with reaction to wanting something you can't have. But we can do more than just understand Nick Land fandom with this approach. There are new monsters to build.

If the Weird fails, apply the hauntological. We cannot deliver whiteness to its longed for death at the hands of the outside, and so we must kill it from within. This may seem at first glance impossible; after all, we've already established its defining negativity as meaning that it has no interior. But we have a way out here: let us assume that we are fucked. Which is to say, let us embrace the central paranoia that Land describes - that because whiteness is fragile and easily contaminated it believes itself endangered and on the brink of a form of genocide - and take it one step further. Instead of assuming that whiteness is always on the brink of a catastrophic invasion of the Other, let us assume that it has already happened, and that any instance of whiteness we look at contains, somewhere within it, the taint and infection that will prove its undoing.

For better or for worse, this is not a particularly large departure from white nationalist thinking, which has always had a place for the enemy within. Indeed, Land identifies the tendency with wit, quoting a passage by a white nationalist writer that takes an unexpected turn (at least to anyone who isn't familiar with white nationalist writing) in its final line: "That's the labyrinth, the trap, with its pitifully constricted, stereotypical circuit. 'Why can't we be cuddly

racial preservationists, like Amazonian Indians? How come we always turn into Neo-Nazis? It's some kind of conspiracy, which means it has to be the Jews.'" And, of course, it's not as though the rank and file neoreactionaries are not blithely anti-semitic on a regular basis (which is more than faintly ironic, given that Yarvin is Jewish).

"My what an impressively diverse collection of rhetorical moves you employ" is not, of course, a sentiment regularly expressed to anti-semites, and with good reason. Their gambit is universal, and indeed displayed in the line after the quote Land reacts to, from a blogger named Tanstaafl who, after concluding that it's all the Jews' fault, asks rhetorically, "Is it factually incorrect to note that the West's entertainment, mass media, and banking systems are disproportionately controlled, even dominated, by Jews? Am I imagining their inordinate sway in academia?" This is always the charge: you can tell the Jews are dangerous because of their disproportionate representation in the corridors of power.

What's important about this is not that there's a goddamn bit of sense to it, but rather that it's a fundamentally different paranoia than, say, cuckolding. This isn't the outside coming in and destroying the last refuge of whiteness. This is the suggestion that the most crucial institutions of power have already fallen into the hands of the Other. And indeed, the choice of the Jews to represent this fear highlights just how deep the horror goes, because it's not like the Jewish diaspora was a "just a couple generations ago" thing like the end of American slavery. If it's the Jews that did it, it got done millennia ago.

While the fascination with who to blame is wholly uninteresting (and the answer of "the Jews" idiotic), the underlying pathology has potential. It suggests a weakness in white culture so deeply embedded as to be functionally inseparable from its basic nature. This forces us to consider white culture as a set of perpetual ruins - as something that has always been lost, and that can only be apprehended as a tenuous and incomplete reconstruction. But more to the point, it resolves one of the fundamental stupidities of white nationalism. Obviously just one; antisemitic conspiracy theories are just as disqualifyingly stupid as scientific racism, after all. But it's hard not to admit that antisemitism is a more complex sort of moronic racism than "black people are inherently stupid and were better off as farm equipment."

What's interesting about it, of course, is that it's actually a position that makes sense when talking about something with the global supremacy of the Cathedral. I mean, not to give too obvious an answer to Land's rhetorical "why can't we be cuddly racial preservationists," but once you've gone and altered literally every other culture on the planet preservation is simply not a problem

you still have to solve. And by redirecting the paranoia to a deep-seated element of white culture, anti-semitism creates a form of stupidity that actually responds to the modern world.

But what's key is how deep-seated an element it is. In the case of anti-semitism, the obvious thing to point out is the way in which Christianity, often though not always treated as a vital part of white/western culture, is inexorably linked to Judaism such that there's no way to have western culture without Judaism. Again, the point is not that Judaism is a remotely plausible or interesting candidate for where we might find the our final monster, but rather the idea that white culture has already fallen.

This does not escape the scope of white nationalism, although that's rather what global supremacy means. Still, it's worth recognizing that the "fallen west" remains a myth that can be played in a straightly neoreactionary manner. "Make America great again," as Steve Jobs or someone said. And indeed, Moldbug's vision of the Cathedral as the product of the continual triumph of the Dissenters differs from the Jewish conspiracy only in the the details of who's responsible; the Puritans apparently turning out to be a techno-atheist's version of the Jews. Assuming that we're fucked means explicitly proclaiming that you can't make America great again, and even if you could, whatever you got would not be an "again" in any meaningful sense. But we're on uncertain ground, carving out space in the ugliest gutters of the gilded city of the philosophers.

Let us take a moment and reflect, then, on the basic nature of uncertain ground. We have already briefly mentioned the most fundamental take on the issue, namely the halting problem, which Alan Turing proved to be insoluble. Although the underlying mathematics are complex, the basic problem is simple enough. As any PC user can attest, left running a computer will eventually either blue screen or get stuck with the cursor as an hourglass. Or, to put it in more formal computer science terms, any given combination of program and input will eventually either halt and return some sort of output (blue screen) or will get stuck running forever (hourglass). The halting problem simply asks which result will occur. Or, rather, in its general case - which is what Turing proved was insoluble (or, technically, undecidable) - it asks whether it is possible to build a program that can look at other programs and determine whether they will halt or not.

Turing's proof is a special case of Kurt Gödel's famous Incompleteness Theorem, which proved that there are mathematical conjectures that cannot be proven true or false, and furthermore that it is impossible to identify all of these conjectures. And indeed there's a whole host of such problems and

proofs, most of which hinge on showing that within a given way of expressing things you can say things like "this statement is false." Indeed, the writer Douglas Hofstadter has made a career out of writing about such "strange loops," as he calls them, most notably in his pop science classic *Gödel, Escher, Bach*, which is what nerdy teenagers in the 1980s read instead of *Harry Potter and the Methods of Rationality*, largely to their credit.

The fascination with these sorts of things is straightforward enough. It's the same appeal as the name *LessWrong*; the acknowledgment of reason's frailty. And thus it is a figure we've seen repeatedly in this labyrinth, whether we called it monstrous offspring, the red pill, or pwnage. (It's not even one that can evade the insidious tentacles of the white nationalist monster; what more important thinker on the subject of uncertainty is there than Werner Heisenberg?) But of these many iterations of the idea there is perhaps none as fundamentally unsettling as Turing's proof. Not even Fish/Milton's notion of the fundamental transgressiveness of language makes quite so deep-reaching an observation about the basic nature of human thought.

The terror lies in the theoretical computer Turing outlines in order to frame his strange loop, the Turing Machine. Its design is extraordinarily simple; it is essentially a list of items and a flowchart that can read from and write to the list. (Turing specifies it as a ticker tape divided into cells and a devices that can read a single cell, write to a cell, and advance one cell forward or backwards as instructed by a finite table of instructions.) But, as mentioned, since Turing formulated the notion in 1936 nobody has been able to outline a design via which it is possible to perform a calculation that cannot be modeled on a Turing Machine, and the hypothesis that no such design exists, called the Church-Turing thesis, is generally accepted as probably true. The laptop upon which I am writing this is wildly faster and more efficient than the ticker tape imagined by Turing, but as long as you don't mind everything running really slow, you could still port all of its programs to the Turing Machine.

Indeed, there's no reason not to think you could port a human brain to a Turing Machine. True, strictly speaking there's no proof that such a thing is possible at all, and it's certainly not even remotely so with current technology, but the set of things a human can do that a computer can't shrinks by the day without any obvious distinction between the two emerging. The possibility that we are a ticker tape machine made of neurons is inescapably plausible.

I admit that I am not sure whether it is ironic or inevitable that Eliezer Yudkowksy provides the final push into horror. Recall his literary Bayesianism, or, better yet, Bayes' theorem itself. To recap, Bayes' theorem is a model for how one can reasonably update one's assumptions based on new information.

For instance, in the example we discussed earlier Yudkowsky looked at what the probability that someone has breast cancer is given that they've had a positive mammogram. But another perfectly usable example is how one might evaluate the likelihood that the human brain is a biomechanical device that, like my laptop, is functionally equivalent to a Turing Machine. And the cold Bayesian truth is that eighty years of computer science research in which design after design has proven equivalent to a Turing Machine does rather suggest that a design created by a couple billion years of blind evolution probably would be too. (Stronger forms of this claim can be found in the form of "digital physics," which holds that physics itself, and thus the entire universe, must be computable.)

This realization is not catastrophe, but very specifically horror. It is the realization that there is no way to tell if there's a way out of any given intellectual labyrinth when you're in it. That any train of thought could be not even a dead end, but a fool's errand, constantly giving the impression that it is going somewhere without ever resolving. That there is no such thing as knowing that you're onto something. This is not a debilitating problem (unless of course it is), but it is irreducible - a hideous truth manifested out of the raw idealism of mathematics itself.

What is important is not so much what follows from this - ultimately nothing that doesn't also follow from Ligotti, or even from Land's observation that, historically speaking, one cannot bet with confidence against reactionary thugs - as the aesthetics of it. It is an oddly compelling fit with our image of white culture's global supremacy. It is the perfect frame with which to understand the sense of stuttering confusion as the impenetrable limits of the planet's atmosphere became white culture's border. Have we halted? Is this the end? Is the Great Filter just slow collapse - an endless sequence of laps on the same ring road as we wait to finally run out of fuel without ever knowing if we had a destination? Are these ruins or buildings in which we shiver?

If they are to be ruins, and that is what we have chosen, they are far from the white nationalist dreams of Albert Speer - some enduring planetary society that will endure then pass away into a beauty more eternal. Even the neoreactionaries know that. White culture's ruins are mental ruins. The analogy to use is a dementia patient, their world a blur of half-recalled faces and daydreams they can't remember if they've woken from. There is a popular therapy technique at nursing homes for dementia patients whereby a mock wedding will be held, with an acted-out ceremony followed by real cake, music and dancing. The patients will fall into the rhythms of a memory, happily enjoying a wedding they're not quite sure why they're at, confidently

recounting stories about a bride and groom who are in reality just two volunteers from the local high school.

The key and fascinating takeaway is that the social order itself - the ritual and theater of a wedding - can be carried out long after the capacity for understanding has eroded. We are talking, after all, about a population that would be hard-pressed to pass the standard interpretation of the Turing Test, little yet the empathy-based one. And yet the imitation of civilization and all its trappings continues, a drone without an operator. (Or, as Ligotti would have it, a puppet.) It is perhaps the best image for white culture that we have found so far - a quasi-consciousness without direction, going through the motions of civilization while it waits to find out how the story ends.

There's a central implication to this worth unpacking, which is the idea that white culture fails the Turing Test. There are obviously complexities in translating this out of metaphor; unlike a nursing home patient, white culture cannot be simply placed at a computer keyboard and told to imitate a woman, and the question of whether it can be modeled on a Turing Machine gives every indication of being as undecidable as the halting problem. But as Nick Land observes, "if you think there's a difference between capitalism and artificial intelligence you're not seeing either at all clearly." And while we'll have to pay the price of unpacking that statement eventually (not that there's much eventually left), for now let's pick at the consequences.

After all, if we are to treat white culture as some sort of existent phenomenon we must assign to it some mechanism of action upon the world. Whatever Kleio's identity, even the Muse of History works through human actors. But the question cannot simply be whether those who act on white culture's behalf would be capable of passing the Turing Test, nor can it be; actual humans, after all, are defined as the control group in the Test's proper formulation. The general principle, however, can still be applied. Simply put, does white culture retain the capacity for empathy?

If the answer is "no" then neoreaction almost demands to be read as a symptom of this loss. Certainly that's what China Miéville suggests in "On Social Sadism," a searing look at the propensity towards casual sadism within late capitalism. Of course sadism and empathy are not mutually exclusive; as *Hannibal* observes, "extreme acts of cruelty require a high level of empathy." And fair enough, but the point of social sadism is that it is not the sort of sadism that has, as Miéville puts it, "Mephistophelean splendour," nor is it the disinterested cliche of the banality of evil. Instead "it's a party-goer; boisterous; braying; a frat alumnus; a bully who loves being a bully; a successful professional, lip-smacking at the misery of those s/he hurts; and

one who is increasingly happy to cop to that enjoyment, to proclaim it, to perform it."

It's the final phrase that's key, and that distinguishes the sadism of the pre-eschaton from the countless sadisms and atrocities of history. And yet Miéville is equally clear that social sadism is an eternal part of the western liberal tradition - in what is for our purposes the essay's key line, he notes, "the Enlightenment was always a dark enlightenment." And to an extent all Miéville is doing in "On Social Sadism" is restating Land with a sense of outrage, although the essay's later sections, which remark on the possibility of a politics of radical empathy and of joy as an alternative to hope, are another excellent source for anyone seeking to construct a new utopian vision of humanity based around the faculty of empathy. Land's entire point, after all, is that capitalism is an inhuman process. When Miéville proclaims that "social sadism is a culture of death," it's all too easy to imagine Nick Land grinning enthusiastically and nodding.

But Miéville's point cuts deeper than that. It's true that his vision of the frat boy as sadistic monster is in many ways Land's Cracker Factory a little further up the class ladder and described from an oppositional perspective, but there's still that image of performance, which is, for Miéville, tied inextricably to the notion that social sadism is a sadism of excess. It is extreme not in the sense that *Hannibal* alludes to - an extremism based on a sort of exquisite focus - but is extreme like carpet bombing is extreme, for no reason other than its disproportion to the task. It is not characterized by lack of empathy so much as by an abscessed, festered empathy. Tellingly, Miéville uses the word "surplus," which, within his own Marxist framework, ties it inexorably to the notion of profit; think here of Moldbug's declaration that profit is the purpose of government and almost the whole of neoreaction becomes clear. And indeed, the idea of a boisterous, partying, drunken performance of sadism runs at once appealingly and uneasily close to the image of dementia patients at a fake wedding, a ritualized process that is not so much dispassionate as it is haunted by a confused and misfiring passion. Neoreaction as terminal restlessness, the most brutal aspects of western civilization's material engine firing blindly into the onrushing black, both figuratively and, as with George Zimmerman, literally.

Very well then. But what of Land's equation of capitalism and artificial intelligence through which we arrived at the point? Which, indeed, sits almost precisely adjacent to the one branch of our initial inquiry we've yet to grapple adequately with, the technofetishism shared by Moldbug, Land, and Yudkowsky. What's that bit of the design for?

VII.

"Your victory was so complete
Some among you thought to keep
A record of our little lives
The clothes we wore, our spoons, our knives
The games of luck our soldiers played
The stones we cut, the songs we made
Our law of peace which understands
A husband leads, a wife commands.
And all of this, expressions of
The sweet indifference some call love
The high indifference some call fate
But we had names more intimate
Names so deep and names so true
They're blood to me, they're dust to you
There is no need that this survive
There's truth that lives and truth that dies"
-Leonard Cohen, "Nevermind"

The most basic answer, of course, would be straightforward technological determinism. Certainly there are inventive eschatons to construct this way. Land, in *Phyl-Undhu*, suggests a potential Great Filter: "absorption into simulations. Cultures swirling out of the universe like dirty water down a plug. Derealization vortices." The joke, of course, is the philosophical idea of simulationism, best framed in its most familiar pop culture terms: we're living in the Matrix. Build out from the grim reality of software as bug-ridden shamble of inelegant and barely-working hacks and shortcuts, also a fair description of the evolutionary process, and you get a depressingly sound account of civilization's fall.

But a straightforwardly causal argument misses what is in some ways the more profound observation, which is that history, evolution, and technological development are all similarly messy and entropic processes. This is Land's actual point when he makes his observation about capitalism and AI: "The Austrians already understood that capitalism is an information processing system, and the decentralized robotics / networks types on the other side grasp that AI isn't going to happen in a research lab. 'Anthropomorphism' has nothing to do with it. Complex Adaptive Systems are the place to start," he

says, before citing Samuel Butler's *Erewhon*, which contains one of the earliest discussions of the possibility of thinking machines, to demonstrate his point.

So the question is less why we would associate technology and eschatology than what we ought make of the current vogue towards picking that particular association. In this regard it's worth thinking in shorter historical terms and recalling that just a few decades ago the reactionary fad was not technofetishism but social Darwinism, with the unchecked excess of capitalism justified as "survival of the fittest." The selection of technology as the analogous process to history as opposed to biology, then, is clearly a substantive cultural move.

To some extent it's just a generational thing, much like using anime characters as your Twitter icon. This is simply the face of eschatology in the decade after cyberpunk, Y2K, *The Matrix*, and *Starcraft*. Those wishing for an interpretation more rooted in macro-history might simply note that the most short-term Great Filters are those originating in the industrial revolution while society itself reels in the early wake of the digital one. The combination makes techno-eschatology irresistibly on-point.

But perhaps we ought maintain our skepticism of causality arguments and ask a question other than "why." For instance, what is the actual content of this technofetishism? Like any eroticization it is as tinged with horror as it is with ecstasy. Land embodies this, but it is perhaps Yudkowsky that illustrates it most clearly simply because he considers the two poles separately. On the one hand is his imagined utopia, reincarnated immortally by his AI god; on the other, the basilisk.

What has always been most prominent about these two techno-eschatons is that they reach backwards to the present. It's not as though this is unique to Yudkowsky, of course - Land's early work used much the same imagery in grappling with capitalism, and he was blatantly just ripping off the plot of *Terminator*, much as *Terminator* ripped off some Harlan Ellison *Outer Limits* scripts. But it's a notable fantasy for several reasons. First, and most obviously, it assumes a future. Even eternal torment at the hands of the basilisk is preferable to dying pointlessly in the food riots that follow California's climate change spurred collapse into dust. Second, it renders the future material, not just as a certainty but as something that, like the past, leaves artifacts in the present.

Fueling this is a particular vision of technology - one that, we really ought stress, is a fantasy not just in the way it imagines a particular and improbable sequence of technological developments, but in the way in which it imagines technological development as something with a teleology in the first place.

There is, crucially, no particular reason to assume this. There's barely a reason to assume that scientific knowledge is something with a teleology, and the equivocation of science and technological development is just as dubious a leap. But the techno-eschaton does so, presuming blithely that artificial intelligence is something that is advanced towards, as opposed to a weird idea.

And it's worth noting, it really might just be a weird idea from some science fiction stories like FTL drives or time travel; a piece of magic that is in fact entirely distinct from advanced technology. Just as we could not entirely rule out the possibility that we are Turing machines, the possibility that the Turing Test actually cannot be passed by a digital computer still cannot be definitively rejected through means other than faith. (Nor can its more unsettling counterpart - the possibility that a Turing-complete computer might be capable of imitating a human female more persuasively than a human female.) But the singular vision of their Singularity is not so much the point as that they believe in *any* Singularity - that there is such a thing as a historically necessary interaction between technology and humanity.

Land, in particular, is full of these. Where Yudkowsky is interesting in the absurd particularity of his techno-eschaton, Land simply gloms onto any and all of them. Futuristic AIs, bionic horizons, Great Filters, within Land's thought you practically can't move for moments where destiny is a technology, all of them, in the end, moments of faith in some hypothesis where the jury may well be out forever. But Land shares Yudkowsky's basic problem: unlike Moldbug, neither of them know a damn thing about building technology. They're both technology fans as opposed to engineers - self-educated dilettantes who read a lot of science and technology articles, both general and specialist. But they have opinions on how computers will develop. Neither of them make them. It's not that this is a problem, of course; users are people too. But it gives their thoughts on the techno-eschaton a particular flavor that, say, an actual software engineer's musings lack. Indeed, the flavor is not entirely unlike that of a software engineer attempting to reinvent political philosophy to someone with any actual expertise or training in the humanities.

But it's worth pointing out that Moldbug is, in fact, an enormously talented engineer. Not least because these are ultimately the terms on which he suggests that his philosophy ought be judged. His very first post on *Unqualified Reservations*, back when he still called his position "formalism," opens by saying, "the other day I was tinkering around in my garage and I decided to build a new ideology," framing the entire project unmistakably in the Steve Jobs-style "I built a tech company in my garage" tradition. Later in the same post he makes it explicit, declaring that the trick to solving the problem of

violence forever is "to look at this not as a moral problem, but as an engineering problem."

The problem is that if his project is to be judged on these terms, it's self-evidently a failure. And to be clear, I don't mean that it does not present a remotely credible worldview, nor that it has not, in point of fact, solved the problem of violence or indeed made a whit of headway on it. These are both true statements, and answer more important questions than whether Moldbug did a good job of engineering a philosophy. What I mean is very simply that there is a gaping and slightly comical hole in Moldbug's design as a design. Literally. In his third and final attempt at a magnum opus, the *Gentle Introduction*, Moldbug divides the ninth and final part into three subsections: Part 9a, Part 9b, and Part 9d.

You could almost believe it's a deliberate joke. Part 9b at one point remarks that something called "the Antiversity is described more fully in the next post." Part 9d, meanwhile, opens by saying that it's going to provide directions on how to stage a fascist coup, but notes that "this coup design (which is not fascist, but reactionary) depends on the information weapon we've just designed - the Antiversity. If you don't have an Antiversity or anything like it, I'm afraid you'll need a different recipe." It's genuinely funny. Except that during the course of a site fundraiser two months after posting Part 9d, Moldbug explained the gap, saying that he was working on "a self-published book I'll be releasing in the next few months: *Motivation and Architecture of the Antiversity*. This started out as part 9c of the Gentle Introduction, but has become its own thing." The fundraiser netted him just over four thousand dollars, but the book never materialized.

Still, this is in most regards no big deal; everyone's got unfinished projects. "You lack a detailed plan for action" has always been an unsatisfying critique of radical thought, and it does not expose any fractures in Moldbug that even approach the significance of those created by his childish order/chaos absolutism. Nevertheless, it marks a genuine failure, if not for Mencius Moldbug, then for Curtis Yarvin. The Antiversity is a technical problem he could not design a solution to that satisfied him. Even if it is not a large problem for his work, it is likely to be a revealing one.

So what was the Antiversity supposed to be? Well, most obviously it's a contrast to the university, which Moldbug continues to hate on the grounds that it is secretly a religion. It is also, as he boasts in Part 9b, "an independent producer of veracity - a truth service. It rests automatic confidence in no other institution. Its goal is to uncover any truth available to it: both matters of fact and perspective. It needs to always be right and never be wrong. Where

multiple coherent perspectives of an issue exist, the Antiversity must provide all - each composed with the highest quality available." And then once it has been constructed Moldbug proposes to ask it "what is to be done? What is the sequel to the coup d'etat? What is Plan B?"

Almost immediately this starts to get away from him. Once the Antiversity has solved the problem of what to do (in, and I quote, "a hundred-page report. Probably with a DVD-sized appendix"), it will of course have to continue existing in some fashion. "The Antiversity," he writes, "continues to guide the New Structure toward stability - acting as the brain of NUSG, just as the University acted as the brain of OUSG. However, where the University pretends to advise the Modern Structure but in reality directs it, the Antiversity pretends to advise the New Structure and in reality advises it." What's striking here is the degree to which, in his vision of this incorruptible replacement for the University, Moldbug has become a techno-eschatologist whose favored technology is political philosophy, contorting himself to believe in the necessary existence of some straightforwardly and self-evidently correct answer to the general problem of what should be done.

It's almost too obvious to point out that the general problem of what should be done seems an even longer shot for solvability than the halting problem. Of course Moldbug couldn't actually build the thing. No, what's really notable here is Moldbug's doe-eyed certainty that such a thing as an absolute truth service could be built; that there is a general plan of action so self-evidently compelling that if he only expressed it properly everyone would immediately flock to his side. In short, after thousands of words railing against the Cathedral for secretly being a religion, he's accidentally reinvented religion. And then lost the holy text. You couldn't parody it better.

Were we Mencius Moldbug, the trick at this point would be to declare that religion is a technology. We have no particular need of the definition-twisting necessary to make it work, however, and it would be a banal affair. Let us instead simply note that religion, broadly speaking, fits the bill for our objective of producing a vision of white culture that is at once productive and eschatological. One need only look at any historical culture to see that religions, like architectural ruins, are one of the means by which they haunt the future. This is exactly the thing we want to design.

Our goal is not, obviously, to finish Moldbug's work for him, not even in some monstrous or inverted form. The time for the Satanic is long past; the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. But it is also not simply the embrace of the University that Moldbug rejects. The contemporary world is of value only because we are stuck within it. But we are surely past any

arrogant assertions that the anthropocene is anything so straightforward as good or evil. There is nothing obvious to progress towards, little yet accelerate towards. Our biggest problem is that we're trapped on a rock surrounded by an infinite void circling a dying sun, and whatever faith we build, it will not be a solution to the general problem of what to do about that.

So Satanism's past its sell-by date and cosmic horror's a cliche. But we've seen that list within this labyrinth once before, albeit just in passing: Thacker's early exploration of black metal by way of setting up a quasi-dialectic (he uses the older medieval term of *quæstio*) between interpreting "black" as Satanic and interpreting it as pagan and synthesizing the options into cosmic horror. Which gives us a third term worth exploring.

Even by our standards this is tenuous, and yet the underlying imagery is consistent enough to support the move. Metal is as plausible a place as any to stage an analysis of white culture, it being a scene notoriously haunted with a white nationalist subculture. As, indeed, is the contemporary pagan community, which includes a white nationalist strain in the Nazi occultist tradition, of turning to European folklore to escape the corruption of Jew-tainted Christianity in amidst the NPR-listening Wiccans with artisan granola businesses. The pagan, meanwhile, fits nicely into our desire for a culture of ruins. As Thacker explains, in contrast with the Luciferian model "paganism denotes less a negative or reactive mode, than an entirely different, and ultimately pre-Christian outlook." Where Satanism works "through opposition and inversion," paganism "is related to the dominant framework of Christianity by exclusion and alterity"

Thacker is uncharacteristically sloppy here - rolling back the Christianization of Europe may not be negative, but it's the very definition of reactionary, hence white nationalist paganism being a thing. And he gets badly ensnared in a set of reversals and elisions when he tries to set up a technology/nature divide between Satanism and paganism, contrasting the Black Mass of Satanism with the animistic and nature-heavy framework of paganism before saying, in rapid succession, that "the magician is less one who uses nature as a tool, and more like a conduit for magical forces," that "whereas in Satanism one finds an attempt to instrumentalize dark forces against light, in paganism magic is technology and vice-versa," and finally declaring, "in contrast to the dark technics of Satanism, then, the dark magic of paganism." But messy suits us, or at least, this mess does. A certain confusion over where technology ends and magic begins is rather the point of the exercise.

What appeals is not the mad folly of returning to the pre-Christian world, but the notion of a system that is lost, not so much driven underground as outright buried, that cannot possibly return but can at best be reconstructed, the seams and patches always visible, wearing its artifice as its sleeve. Our goal is not the magical revelation sought but not found by Moldbug. It is not Kleio, author of history. It is not even Gnon, Nick Land's meta-god of imminent reality. And it is certainly not an AI that will make us live forever. It's just a ghost story - a strange play of the light late in the long anthropocene night. And if, like any ghost story, it is a bit of a shaggy dog tale, well, history always is. Nobody gasses on like a victor.

This leaves a single thread of the labyrinth upon which we have not pulled, namely the work of William Blake. As mentioned, Blake was a literal visionary, which is to say that his art and poetry was directly inspired by visions. The strange cosmos he illuminates across what are generally referred to as his prophetic works, in other words, is not some mere fiction, nor even the sort of inspired adaptation of a religious tale that Milton offers. What Blake offers is nothing more nor less than a fully fledged religious system rooted in revelation as credible as any other. Moreover, he offers a system that is firmly rooted in white culture, emerging equally out of the British druidic tradition and the Christian Dissenter tradition Blake was raised within. An abandoned branch of white paganism, in other words, ripe for the haunting.

Blake's system begins with Urizen, depicted as an old man with long white hair and beard, deliberately echoing traditional depictions of the Christian God-the-Father. The name, as with many of Blake's mythological figures, is a pun - a homophone of "your reason," which points straightforwardly to Urizen's role in the system. He is a figure of precision - early in the eponymous *Book of Urizen* Blake describes him bringing the world into being by measuring it: "Times on times he divided, & measur'd / Space by space in his ninefold darkness." But he is also a lawgiver, writing a book "of eternal brass" that fixes the world into "One command, one joy one desire, / One curse, one weight, one measure / One King, one God, one Law."

Blake was, to say the least, not a fan. He railed against such fixity and uniformity, most famously in a letter in which he prayed, "May God us keep / From Single vision & Newtons sleep." This is in many ways the most elemental and axiomatic principle in Blake; he reacts to single vision with the same furious terror that Moldbug reacts to chaos and Yudkowsky to bad math teachers. As he put it in another oft-quoted bit, "I must Create a System. or be enslav'd by another Mans / I will not Reason & Compare: my business is to Create." And create he did, becoming both one of the great poets and visual

artists of Britain; a voice it is impossible to imagine anything that deserves to be called "humanity" ever forgetting.

More pragmatically, Blake opposed Urizen with Los, a creator figure. Los appears in many forms throughout Blake's mythos, but in *The Book of Urizen* at least, he is a builder, depicted as a muscular man with a hammer. Horrified and in anguish at Urizen's dominion he launches into a furious act of creation, forging chains to bind Urizen. And yet Blake's myth is no simple tale of tyrannical reason and rebellious imagination. That would be too singular a vision for Blake. Instead Los's creation serves merely to give Urizen a material form, which is just as terrible and singular a prison as the cold darkness of Urizen's law. Los is struck dumb by the awful weight of what he is done, and is rent in two by his pity, creating Enitharmon, with whom he has a child, described as a "Worm" and revealed eventually to be Orc, the spirit of revolution within Blake's mythos.

It is important to realize that, structurally, Blake is riffing heavily on *Paradise Lost*, and thus more broadly the Book of Genesis - hence, for instance, Enitharmon splitting off from Los much as Eve is grown from Adam's rib. And instead of being tempted into sex and lust by the serpent they birth the serpent, who, as a literal embodiment of revolution, is even more Whiggish than the Devil. But more broadly, Blake has made his strange inversion of Milton almost entirely out of repetitions of Milton's basic dramatic act of the fall. Urizen splits himself out of Eternity through the act of self-definition, a reenactment of Satan's fall through the existence of his own ego. This division in turn creates Los out of the remnant, who then falls in turn to create Enitharmon.

What's even more interesting, though, is that Los's fall occurs because of his reaction to gazing upon the material body that he has created for Urizen. Blake gives over a tremendous portion of the poem to meticulously describing the creation of this body in unsettlingly carnal terms - at one point, for instance, "In ghastly torment sick; / Within his ribs bloated round, / A craving Hungry Cavern; / Thence arose his channeld Throat, / And like a red flame a tongue / Of thirst & of hunger appeard." To say the process humanizes Urizen is almost crudely literal. And then Los's reaction is explicitly Pity - Blake capitalizes the term, and uses it as the initial name for Enitharmon. So in Blake's system the first fall comes from the recognition of the self, and the second comes from the recognition of the other - from empathy, if you will.

Another intriguing parallel arises in the idea that Urizen was severed from Eternity. This is another fundamental concept in Blake - his version of the Singularity, at once Day of Judgment and Big Bang. In essence, it is a notion

of absolute simultaneity - a unity of all things in which there is no division of time, self, or other. (Those inclined to make cross-cultural connections will note that Blake's Eternity is not unlike the Australian Aboriginal notion of the Dreamtime, but we promised not to introduce new concepts.) Significantly, Blake's telling of this structure is never merely cyclical - even in his late epics like *Jerusalem* and the unfinished *Four Zoas* where Blake tells a tale stretching from creation to destruction, there is no sense that the return to Eternity at the end of creation constitutes a loop back to the start. But the resulting structure is at once hauntological and Weird, with dead gods lurking beneath the world waiting to emerge and futures speaking to the past through prophecy, and, moreover, these two events being indistinguishable and sliding freely from one to the other.

This highlights the more salient point about Eternity, which is that it allows Blake to avoid single vision within his own mythology. All of his prophetic works are tales of schism from Eternity, and reflect Eternity's nature through their variety. Or, in plainer terms, the prophetic works contradict each other left, right, and center. Indeed, they regularly contradict themselves, causing odd sequences such as in *The Book of Urizen*, where Los is introduced midway through Chapter III and then, a few lines later, it's casually mentioned that "Urizen was rent from his side," despite no mention or allusion to this when Urizen is introduced in the poem's first lines, "Lo, a shadow of horror is risen / In Eternity! Unknown, unprolific! / Self-closd, all-repelling; what Demon / Hath form'd this abominable void / This soul-shudd'ring vacuum? - Some said / "It is Urizen", But unknown, abstracted / Brooding secret, the dark power hid." This is not sloppy writing on Blake's part, but a deliberate attempt to create a world in which things have multiple simultaneous natures; where ambiguity is not a lack but a presence. Blake's world revises itself, just as he endlessly revised his illuminated manuscripts, rearranging pages and hand-painting each copy, making each singular so that the work as a whole could never be.

Similarly, aspects of his mythology are retold in other poems from different perspectives and with different results. *The Book of Urizen* tells of how Orc, the spirit of revolution, is born of Los and Enitharmon and will come to oppose Urizen, but the confrontation never happens. The poem instead simply leaves off with the children of Urizen forgetting Eternity in a grotesque and inverted parody of the Book of Genesis ("Six days they shrunk up from existence / And on the seventh day they rested / And they bless'd the seventh day, in sick hope") and journeying out from Egypt to begin the process of history, Orc's fate entirely unresolved. The tale is instead picked up in *America a Prophecy*, the

first poem in a separate mythological cycle engraved around the same time and collectively referred to as the Continental Prophecies.

America a Prophecy takes one of Blake's most radical approaches to mythology, entwining his pantheon with material history to retell the American Revolution with the blood and thunder of Ragnarok. The poem opens "The Guardian Prince of Albion burns in his nightly tent, / Sullen fires across the Atlantic glow to America's shore: / Piercing the souls of warlike men, who rise in silent night, / Washington, Franklin, Paine & Warren, Gates, Hancock & Green; / Meet on the coast glowing with blood from Albions fiery Prince." Later, there are dragons. It's fucking metal.

But just as *The Book of Urizen* is not a straightforward tale of Los's triumph against Urizen's tyranny, *America a Prophecy* is no paean to the triumph of revolution. Indeed, it rivals Moldbug for the most pessimistic take on the American Revolution within our tale. Blake's account of the Revolution is of gradual corruption and decline, ultimately amounting to nothing. At first, as the prospect of revolution against the King of England (never named as George III due to Blake's fears of arrest and prosecution) washes over America there are scenes of rejoice. "The bones of death, the cov'ring clay, the sinews shrunk & dry'd. / Reviving shake, inspiring move, breathing! Awakening! / Spring like redeemed captives when their bonds & bars are burst; / Let the slave grinding at the mill run out into the field: / Let him look into the heavens & laugh in the bright air." But after Orc announces himself to challenge Urizen and war breaks out things are altogether less idyllic - at one point Blake describes how "the plagues creep on the burning winds driven by flames of Orc." And at the end it is Urizen who remains in control, but the Revolution rumbles onward, Orc's fire consuming Europe. It is pessimistic in the extreme, offering only violence and turmoil.

Like Moldbug, then, Blake views revolution as a source of chaos and suffering; a well-intentioned pursuit that inevitably goes wrong. Admittedly Blake thinks it goes south in part because of the failure of the American Revolution to liberate the slaves whereas Moldbug sighs wistfully at the idea of a well-run plantation, but then, Blake has dragons too. It doesn't mean there aren't significant similarities. No, the big difference is that Blake sees revolution as inadequate, not misguided. For Blake, revolution is an intermediate step, historically inevitable but incomplete; the Continental Prophecies end in "Asia" (one of two poems within *The Song of Los*, the other, "Africa," being a prequel to *America a Prophecy*) with a spiritual resurrection that emerges from Orc and Urizen's final clash - a resurrection of the dead that ends with Urizen weeping as the Grave itself becomes a character in the

poem, shrieking and coming alive, the poem ending with a description of how "Her bosom swells with wild desire: / And milk & blood & glandous wine." ("Glandous" is a word of Blake's own invention, serving to emphasize the carnal nature of the Grave's awakening.) Less revolution than revelation.

Blake told the tale again from a different vantage point, and with a slight change to the casting, in *The Book of Ahania*, composed the same year as *The Song of Los*. Here the figure is not named Orc but Fuzon, one of Urizen's children established at the end of *The Book of Urizen,* and associated with fire (the four children of Urizen lining up with the four classical elements). His description at the poem's start thus closely mirrors Orc's in *America a Prophecy*, focusing on his flaming and terrible visage, and like Orc he leads a rebellion against Urizen. But inasmuch as Fuzon embodies revolution he is its most fallen form, lacking all traces of grace or nobility. Fuzon is nothing more than a rebellious son transgressing against the father, seeing Urizen as weak and seeking to rule in his place. In fact Urizen dispatches him brutally - he kills Fuzon mere moments after Fuzon triumphantly proclaims himself "God… eldest of things" late in the second of five chapters, and spends the third chapter nailing his corpse to the Tree of Mystery.

Instead Fuzon's rebellion is the occasion for the creation of the eponymous Ahania, who is rent from Urizen during Fuzon's initial attack, withering away when Urizen spurns and rejects her. In the poem's final chapter, however, the focus returns to her, closing with an extended recounting of her lament in the face of her separation and torment. It is, in many ways, an even more pessimistic ending than Orc's faltering at the end of *America a Prophecy* or Urizen's dominion at the close of *The Book of Urizen*; certainly the anguish of her monologue is one of the most affecting parts of Blake's work.

Ahania is not the first feminine figure to be cleaved from a male one that we have seen; there is already Enitharmon's creation out of Los, explored minimally in *The Book of Urizen*, but a key concept in the mythology all the same. Like Ahania she is a sympathetic figure - indeed explicitly, defined at first out of Los's pity for the newly material Urizen. And yet in *Europe a Prophecy*, the second of the Continental Prophecies, she fuses with Orc and brings about a centuries-long reign of darkness upon Europe, which is to say that her "goodness" is as ambiguous as anyone else's. But for Ahania the balance is different; instead of becoming an inverted power like Enitharmon, Ahania is largely powerless, denied true form, depicted as a mere shadow.

And yet for all her impotence she offers the most compelling alternative to Urizen's dark enlightenment that we have seen thus far in Blake. Ahania is a force of pleasure - tellingly, she splits off from Urizen's loins, and his rejection

of her emerges out of jealousy. She, meanwhile, speaks of a lost joy, and of how her joy would "awaken" Urizen, transforming him from tyrannical builder to a farmer bringing forth a bountiful harvest. And yet this pleasure goddess (the phrase is gag-worthy, yet accurate) is inextricably associated with and fundamentally springs from a figure of reason and abstracted intellect. This is not some nerd bimbo fantasy of course; Ahania instead represents a sort of idyllic unity of humanity not unlike what Land describes in *Phyl-Undhu* as the prehistory of the fallen virtual world, when "men mingled freely with gods at the edge of Heaven" and when 'delight, learning, and work were indistinct," a time that ends with "Scission." As with Land, this is a state lost to our fallen world, but its presence both haunts the world and offers it redemption.

And indeed, just as Los, Orc, Enitharmon, and Ahania fail to be unalloyed and straightforward heroes, so does Urizen fail to ever quite be a villain, even as Blake rails endlessly against him. The description of his books of single vision is a grim joke - their composition of "eternal brass" evoking the copper plates upon which Blake's own work was created. Urizen's method of endless precision is self-critique - Blake confronting his own propensity for endless revision and adjustment, and the way in which he insisted on translating his radical and immediate visions into laborious and precise artistic representations. If the cold tyranny of reason could not be redeemed, neither could Blake himself.

(If both Los and Urizen are to be taken as avatars of Blake - and the case for Los is straightforward - then it would in turn suggest that both Ahania and Enitharmon should be read as analogues of his wife, Catherine. The latter is a common reading; the former, despite being more moving given the idea of Urizen's redemption, less so. In a tale without enough women, however, Catherine Blake is worth alighting upon briefly, as she is a fascinating character. They met while he was reeling from a failed previous relationship, and when he asked her if she pitied him and she said yes, he proclaimed his love for her. She was illiterate - her signature on their wedding contract is simply an X - but Blake taught her to read and write over the course of their marriage. Through his life, which had all the difficulties one would imagine of an artist and prophet who insisted on hand-coloring and hand-selling his work in tiny limited editions, she was a constant source of support, unwavering in her belief in him and his visions. Blake discusses her directly in *Milton a Poem*, addressing the spirit Ololon who has come to visit him, "Virgin of Providence fear not to enter into my Cottage / What is thy message to thy friend: What am I now to do / Is it again to plunge into deeper affliction? Behold me / Ready to obey, but pity thou my Shadow of Delight / Enter my Cottage,

comfort her, for she is sick with fatigue." It is, for my money, one of the most moving passages in all of English literature.)

There is a conceptual shift here that is vital to the development of Blake's mythology over his career, from the idea of opposing reason to redeeming it. Indeed, the shift in effect draws a curtain over two phases of his career. His two most-read works, both non-prophetic illuminated manuscripts from his early career, are *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* and *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, both of which, as their titles suggest, deal with relatively straightforward binaries. Blake complicates both, as he does his various binary oppositions to Urizen, but his starting point is the idea of straightforward opposition. And this is an explicit theme of the period - he outright says in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* that "Without Contraries is no progression. Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate, are necessary to Human existence." (It is notable that Blake is more or less pre-inventing the Hegelian dialectic here, though he's hardly the first; c.f. the *quaestio*.)

But in the dying days of the eighteenth century, Blake changed focus. He finished the expansion of *Songs of Innocence* into its final form in 1794, spent 1795 wrapping up the two myth cycles he'd begun with *America a Prophecy* and *The Book of Urizen* (all with considerably shorter and less artistically ornate works that hint at his changing interests), and did not complete another illuminated or prophetic work for sixteen years, although he worked on three over the course of that period, ultimately finishing two (*Milton a Poem* in 1811 and *Jerusalem The Emanation of The Giant Albion* in 1820) and leaving a third incomplete (*Vala*, aka *The Four Zoas*, abandoned in 1807). Where his early prophetic works were relatively short - the longest, *The Book of Urizen*, is twenty-eight pages, eleven of which are illustrations and many others of which are dominated by their art - his latter three are vast epics - *Milton* is fifty pages, *Jerusalem* a hundred, and both are dominated by pages of full text with lightly illustrated borders.

This sudden expansion in his work's complexity is mirrored by the underlying mythology, which began expanding rapidly to encompass possibilities beyond mere Contraries. Where his early works had presented an opposition to Urizen, found it inadequate, then stumbled, unable to progress beyond attempting to re-envision the encounter - to look again in search of some "right" answer. Starting with *The Four Zoas*, however, his system broadened. Los is reworked as the fallen form of a greater being, Urthona, and his dualism with Urizen is reframed as a quadrism, with the pair joined by Luvah, representing passion and love (it's another bad Blake pun), and Tharmas, representing the physical body, and specifically sensation.

The Zoas are, collectively, the fallen form of primeval and perfected man, whom he names Albion after one of the ancient names for Britain. And Blake ties them to the land itself, ascribing for each a directional correspondence: Tharmas is West, Urizen South, Luvah East, and Urthona North. And just as Los/Urthona and Urizen have their female counterparts - called now Emanations - so do Tharmas and Luvah. Tharmas's is named Enion (note the back formation of Enitharmon's name; she is indeed their child even as she is also Los's Emanation), who represents sexual desire, while Luvah's counterpart is Vala, who focuses his passion into eroticized warfare, and who sparks a conflict between Luvah and Urizen that is, in the new telling of the myth, the reason for Urizen's fall.

Here the system quickly grows unwieldy. Orc is repositioned as the fallen form of Luvah, just as Los is of Urthona - a fascinating equation, not least because Luvah is also positioned as analogous to Christ (though so is Los at one point). Albion acquires his own Emanation, Jerusalem, who is Liberty, and finds himself torn between her and the temptations of Vala (now her fallen form as opposed to Luvah's Emanation). Milton departs Heaven and voluntarily falls to Earth to redeem his own religious errors, visiting Blake to be reunited with his own lost feminine aspect. Ahania is exposed to sexuality in the form of Enion by Los and Enitharmon, becoming sinful in Urizen's eyes, only to be partially reunited with him in the Last Judgment, still bound to a Persephone-like cycle of annual death and rebirth. Los attempts to construct a city of imagination, Golgonooza. Time fractures and folds in on itself so that Blake's London and ancient Jerusalem (which is still also Albion's Emanation) become one. It is a dizzying tangle that Blake himself never quite unwound; a cosmology that visibly confounded its sole prophet.

This is not, of course, to say that there is nothing of value in these later works. For one thing, even if Blake found himself lost within the labyrinth of his own cosmology, that doesn't mean it is not a fascinating journey. More than that, however, it's simply a good cosmology. The underlying Imagination/Reason dualism is compelling; a distinction well-founded in culture and thought that is nevertheless not one upon which any other famous cosmology has been built. The four Zoas are recognizable cousins of pagan and esoteric structures, but removed enough to not quite have straightforward equivalences in any other mythology. They have that marvelous feature of the best gods: perfectly answering a question you didn't know you had. Patriarchal authorities abound in myth, but the tyrant geometer Urizen is unlike any other; war goddesses are common, but few make their erotic fantasy the explicit point as Vala does. And a few, such as Ahania, are genuinely breathtaking in

their scope: a pleasure goddess representing intellectual curiosity who is bound in a Persephone-like structure of death and rebirth is a metaphysical/literary construct to rival Milton's Satan, and one Blake barely scratches the surface of. These are gods worth trafficking with, and given that, the fact that their prophet-creator left so much unfinished business can hardly be called a fault.

Indeed, there are not really any concepts we have encountered thus far within this labyrinth that cannot be grappled with through Blake. Urizen is an even more brutal satire of Moldbug than Satan was; the Cathedral self-evidently exactly what Blake means when he has Urizen bind the world in the Web of Religion. Yudkowsky's AI heaven is a sci-fi Golgonooza, the fourfold City of Imagination, the Jerusalem Blake imagined built in England's green and pleasant land built instead of silicon and glass. Even Gnon, Land's mad and howling anti-God, is easily framed as a fallen form of Tharmas, the material world reduced to its brutal edge alone; the match is solid down to the melliflous pairing of Gnon and Orc as counterparts. (Gnon is even a bad pun - an acronym for God of Nature Or Nature.) Even the more sympathetic concepts have their clear mirrors. Enitharmon works compellingly as an embodiment of empathy, which serves as an irreducible possibility of redemption surviving even the longest night of human suffering. There can be few writers who capture a sense of fundamental repulsion and horror at the notion of identity as vividly as Blake and Ligotti. And as monstrous wonders go, well, you're spoiled for choice, but I'll go ahead and step outside the prophetic works to simply say "fearful symmetry." Indeed, while Yudkowsky, whose taste in literature seems to exclude anything written above an eighth grade level, can perhaps be forgiven for not considering Blake, for Moldbug to miss Blake's preemptive refutation of his entire worldview is a genuine oversight.

But more significant are the things within Blake's vision that do not have easy correspondences, good or bad. These include, of course, many of the figures we've already identified as compelling. Vala, for instance, who is in one form "a hungry Stomach & a devouring Tongue. / Her Hand is a Court of Justice, her Feet two Armies in Battle / Storms & Pestilence in her Locks: & in her Loins Earthquake. / And Fire. & The Ruin of Cities & Nations & Families & Tongues," and in another a "nameless shadowy Vortex" who is also an archer "Crown'd with a helmet & dark hair" but unable to speak due to her tongue being made of iron, has no obvious analogues. Perhaps Vauung, Nick Land's monstrous war, but his conception of it is drenched in language, Vala oppressed under Urizen, utterly devoid of her libidinous glamour.

And while Enitharmon represents the capacity for empathy that Turing identifies as the heart of what it is to be a person, Turing ultimately seeks how to represent and identify that capacity. He may stop short of Yudkowsky's ridiculous attempt to systematize empathy into decision theory, but it is still empathy as understood by algorithm. Enitharmon is more - born of pity so deep it cracked Los's being in two, and most famously depicted in Blake's painting *The Night of Enitharmon's Joy* as a dark-haired maiden face of a triple goddess sitting unmolested in a tiny glowing circle within a night of strange and fantastic beasts. Turing's paper stops at ESP.

And speaking of Yudkowsky, while Ahania may recognizably be the fuel that drives his quest for an AI god, he is only ever capable of recognizing her as an object. There are few aspects of *Harry Potter and the Methods of Rationality* so disappointing as its treatment of Hermione, who, by temperament, ought fit Yudkowsky's interpolation of Rowling perfectly, and yet is instead left as a curiosity - a beloved relic of Rowling's naive fantasy never quite allowed to prove that she's better-adapted to rationality than Harry is to Magic. Instead she's capriciously killed (indeed, literally fridged) near the book's denouement, then brought back to life by Voldemort to give everything a utopian ending.

It is at this point necessary to note that in all three of these examples the nearest analogue to Blake's concept has stumbled in the face of its overt femininity. And perhaps further to admit that this is generally where Blake himself becomes ensnared in his later mythology, tripping over how to handle the feminine just as he had over his early dualisms. We ought not find this surprising, of course; it has been a known flaw of the conceptual terrain we've encircled for some time. But it is revealing. If the racial other was, in the end, a bridge too far for white culture - too much a step into utopia - then the female might prove a more immediately useful step. White culture's global domination allows for a myth of purity to exist. But there is no way to declare women to exist outside. That is not to say they cannot be oppressed - that this narrative could be constructed largely in their absence is evidence enough that they are second class subjects of the white empire. But their oppression is always going to resemble anti-semitism more than anti-black racism. Obviously it is different from both, working largely in a logic of objectification bundled with the old Miltonian "woman as man's weakness" bullshit. But while they may be penned into a virgin/whore complex within white culture, they are at least inextricably within white culture.

At this juncture it is in some ways impossible to avoid at least fleeting mention of Eliezer Yudkowsky's pastiche of the Japanese light novel form, *A Girl Corrupted by the Internet is the Summoned Hero?!*, simply because it is in

material point of fact just about the only exception to the "there really aren't any women dealt with in all of this" observation (those keeping score will note that Catherine Blake was the only nonfictional one, while Martin and Fanon were the only people of color). There is, to be clear, lots wrong with it, starting with its main character - a woman named Yuuki Yugano whose sole interest is depraved Internet pornography being summoned to a magical realm while she's in the middle of masturbating. It ends with her acquiring Satan himself as a sex slave through a combination of decision theory and depravity. Yuuki is firmly an object in the narrative - a fetish object mashed up inscrutably with Yudkowsky's peculiar brand of "rationality" and set loose on an unsuspecting genre. It's at best cringingly awkward and at worst horrifyingly sexist.

And yet it is oddly hard to hate, especially in the larger context. Certainly it's preferable to another rambling Moldbug post about how racism is secretly wonderful. And it's hard not to suggest that the world would be a better place if Yudkowsky had stuck to children's literature for adult geeks as opposed to starting a weird AI cult that derails efforts to curtail malaria. But the issue is not even that fiction is preferable to theory (that would be kind of awkward at this point, actually); I dare say *A Girl Corrupted by the Internet is the Summoned Hero?!* is in genuine ways better than *Phyl-Undhu* as well. This is not true on technical grounds; *Phyl-Undhu* is a far more artful and intelligent work. But there is an unexpected sweetness to its unapologetic perversity. Yudkowsky is (ironically) not always the most self-aware of people, but there is no way to seriously suggest that he is not in on the joke implicit in him publishing an erotic comedy novelette. The story may be objectifying, but the exaggerated innocence of the light novel form keeps it from becoming exploitatively gross (indeed, Yuuki starts and ends the story as a virgin), whereas it's difficult to ignore the fact that *Phyl-Undhu* goes out of its way to make fun of the suggestion that neoreaction is "fascist."

There is a sense of joy in Yudkowsky's story, in other words, that comes from its erotic content, and this is a good thing. It would be a better thing if this sense of joy were less framed in the utter banality of what passes for mainstream pornography, but again, it's not a creepy cult that lost its shit over a thought experiment, and in context that's a result. But much like empathy (which is, let's face it, not entirely unrelated to eroticism), it's a starting point. Something much more reminiscent of a way forward exists in Blake, who is, if we're going to remain in the immediate vernacular of the erotic, clearly into some messed up fucking shit.

But for all Blake's promise, as mentioned, he stumbles. The erotic possibility of Blake is a constant undercurrent that bursts through in patches

like roots through a sidewalk, and indeed part of the joy of his mythology is pointedly that it is not the basis for any creepy cults, but in the end the same banalities that doom Yudkowsky apply. His perversities are limitations, not launchpads - snares in which he is entangled and cannot quite escape. Women are problems; glorious, at times worshipped, but still, ultimately, objects rather than subjects.

We ought not be entirely surprised; white culture has sealed off this exit just as thoroughly as any other. (The Cracker Factory is real.) But by this point the countermove is equally obvious. With no way out, turn within. Which, let's face it, the erotic often does. But let's skip the easy masturbation metaphor and try instead to genuinely use the erotic as a launchpad, seeing how far we can actually go towards escaping the jaws of the fast-approaching monstrous end. Not sex, but what sex represents. After all, the transgressive brilliance of Blake is hardly restricted to his more overtly erotic moments. It is his entire vision that compels. What shines and animates the work is its furious insistence of it all; those parts that are straightforwardly erotic are, in the end, merely the domain of one Emanation of one Zoa. All of it demands to be seen, and Blake, ever the good prophet, obliges. Perhaps, then, not so much a decision to look within or without as around. Behind, above, down, any direction that is not forward. We know what's there, after all.

How might our three Great Heroes of white culture appear if Blake's gaze were to turn upon them? If he were called out from Eternity to judge how Albion has fared in his absence, what would he think of Yudkowsky, Moldbug, and Land? I do not think he would find them unsympathetic. Blake did not fully embrace the heroic, but he did not reject it, and their sense of themselves as great men carrying a torch forward into darkness would have appealed to him, however perversely. Still, it is hard to imagine Moldbug or Yudkowsky registering as anything more than thralls of Urizen, their vision constricted utterly by his Net of Religion. Sympathetic, but no more so than any of the other fettered and tormented figures that dot Blake's visionary landscape. Land is fleetingly more interesting, but then, like Milton, was never really the hero of his tale - merely a fellow visionary. His menagerie of horrors is worthy of a glance, his awareness that he's of the devil's party even worth a respectful nod. But were Blake to put his pen to capturing one of Land's monsters, it would be interesting more for having been seen by Blake than for the mere flea's ghost it is. For all their bombast, then, and all the weird and spectral horrors found within their labyrinth, they are but a tiny, glinting bit of golden thread stitched within a tapestry far more grandiose and monstrous.

What, after all, does Land threaten in the end? That history will be brutal? That there will be war and death and horror? Do we really imagine that Blake did not already know this? That a man who bore witness to Vala's corruption of Albion, to the American Revolution's collapse into Orc's fury, who had not a pop industry in his head but a pantheon of gods and monsters would even blink at these revelations? Of course the enlightenment was dark and teeming with unfathomable and nameless terrors. Enlightenment belongs to Urizen, after all.

But Urizen is redeemable. No, more than that, Urizen contains his redemption within the fractal depths of contradictions and revisions that are his very being, first among them his Emanation, Ahania, who recognizes that darkness exists only to be delved into - who does so herself, over and over again in her endless cycle of death and return.

From this, there can only be mysteries. We keep track of the walls, trying to count turns and forks, but through all of this we assumed it was a maze. We had not considered that we might have simply been walking in within a small grove of trees, our hands tracing circles around their trunks, our train of thought unknowingly stuck in a loop that cannot possibly halt. The forest is big, and our torch is small, yes. But this does not matter. Even the tiny portion we have mapped is enough to know that forbidden trees are always explored. We go onwards. We have no choice. But if we're going in circles, that means that the monster is not, in fact, waiting ahead of us, but…

And now the moment of terror. The inevitable punchline. Its gaze upon us, hot and wet like breath on our neck and blood in our veins. It is here, and charging, and now. The fundamental instinct applies: the only question we have ever known to ask: what follows from this? How do we react?

Bioterrorist, infect thyself.